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Politics, Ethics and Culture in Our Time

A Post-civilizational Perspective

By

Harry Redner



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For Joachim my son



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Jill Redner

PART 1

West and East



Introduction to Part 1

We are now undergoing a historic transformation in the destiny of mankind that is in many ways as decisive as any of those in the historic past, perhaps as far back as the Neolithic Revolution. For the very first time in history mankind has come together in a global society that some have called a technological civilization. It is certainly thanks to technology that this unification of previously separated human groups – whether they be tribes, nations or civilizations – has been made possible. Will this result in a truly global civilization? This is still a moot point, which it will be our concern to investigate. But undeniably the conditions of human living have become more alike all over the globe, and these are certainly utterly unlike those of any of the previous civilizations. In short, we are entering a new age in the development of the whole of humanity.

Ever since the Neolithic Revolution the majority of human beings had been acquiring their sustenance either as peasant farmers or pastoralists. Only a small minority were able to live in cities, whose number and size reflected the size of the agricultural surplus that a particular way of farming could afford. It was this creative minority of city dwellers who were responsible for the civilizations which cropped up in various localities at different times throughout history. Some of these civilizations were the loci of the High Cultures, which attained the achievements in religion, art, literature, philosophy and the early beginnings of science that we treasure to this day. Each of these unique and distinct civilizations developed its own variants of universal cultural forms.

What is happening now is in many ways the inverse of what took place throughout the history of civilizations. Now most people are living in cities whose size has grown to gigantic proportions never thought possible in the past. Only a small minority of farmers cultivate the land, but thanks to science and technology they can produce enough to provide for a previously unimaginable standard of living to a total population many times that of the past, one soon to reach ten billion. By contrast, the cultural productions of our time pale in comparison to those of the past. In religion, art, literature and philosophy we seem to be no longer capable of creating anything that bears comparison with the achievements of past civilizations, above all our own Western Civilization.

We are now faced with an overwhelming paradox: materially we are much better off than ever before, but culturally we are much the poorer for it. It is almost as if we have bought well-being for our bodies at the cost of the impoverishment of our souls, or nourished our flesh at the expense of the starvation of our spirit. But that is an old-fashioned theological way of putting it, which hardly any sophisticated person could now entertain. Another perhaps more

intellectually acceptable way of putting it, is that we are confronted with a paradox of Progress. For while humanity has undoubtedly progressed in so many material ways, it has undoubtedly regressed in others, those which we call cultural, for short. This paradox of Progress is a most peculiar existential condition never before encountered in human history. Our main aim in this work is to elucidate it and show how and why it arose in the first place.

To understand the nature of the changes that the whole of humanity is now undergoing, and to appreciate the magnitude of these epochal transformations, we must go back to the very beginning of history. By the beginning of history, we do not mean the start of the evolution of *homo sapiens* as a species, or even the much later culmination of that evolution in the recognizably human achievements of early human cave dwellers. Rather, we mean something relatively more recent than that, which is encapsulated in the opposition between prehistoric Man in contrast to historic mankind. Hegel had articulated a similar distinction between historic and nonhistoric peoples, which in his time was more or less cognate with that between civilized and primitive people, often then referred to as savages. The comparison we have in mind is nothing as invidious as that, but corresponds to the one that anthropologists make between hunter-gatherers and agriculturalists or pastoralists.

On the basis of this distinction, we might postulate that history begins with the Neolithic Revolution, which first arose in the Fertile Crescent of the Middle East and spread from there to Europe and India; or alternatively occurred as independent developments, in New Guinea, Africa, America and many other places on earth. The Neolithic Revolution was crucial to the start of history for it was only then that human beings ceased to be completely dependent on Nature's bounty – on what the environment in which they found themselves provided – and became capable of transforming it by means of their own labour.

On this view, liberation from the thrall of Nature is the beginning of history, which from then on transforms itself into an ever-greater domination of Nature, which is how the Frankfurt School thinkers, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno portray it in works such as the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Adorno and Horkheimer stipulate that what we have now attained is the total domination of Nature through technology and the capitalist mode of production at its most developed; and also, therefore, at its most repressive and exploitative.¹ Once Nature is thus completely mastered, then this completes the preliminary phase of human development and leads to an end of history in

1 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Allen Lane, 1972).

this sense, or what Marx called pre-history, prior to true history. The Frankfurt thinkers, however, were more in accord with Hegel's view of the end of history than with Marx's view. But we need not elaborate this difference here as it is not germane to our main topic.

We are not concerned with the end of history, only with the end of civilization. History and civilization are not coextensive. There was a long period of history between the Neolithic Revolution and the start of the first civilization, again in the Middle East some eight or nine millennia later; and there might be as long a period following the end of civilization. Civilization might only have been a stage in history, one of approximately 5000 years duration. What follows civilization we have referred to as a post-civilizational condition, and by that we do not mean a post-historical condition.² It might well turn out that civilization will prove to have been a special historical formation whose time is now past. We have no way of knowing this for we cannot predict the distant future. But we can know that what is now happening amounts to a failure of civilization which might be permanent or might prove to be only temporary. In some form or other civilization might eventually return, but it is also possible that it will never come back. But these are imponderable matters, about which it is idle to speculate.

We do not know and do not presume to prophesy what will happen after civilization. However, we do know what has already happened to civilization. We can examine the present state of our own Western Civilization and that of all the other civilizations that were coeval with it, in particular the Chinese, Indian and Islamic, and seek to assess what they have come to over the course of the last few centuries. It is perhaps easier to see what has happened to the others than to ourselves, namely, to our own Western Civilization, because we ourselves, during the so-called colonialist phase, were the perpetrators of much of the damage that the others suffered. This has now translated itself into a sense of guilt that has had unfortunate consequences for historical scholarship, for some historians are inclined to attribute virtues to the colonized societies that they never possessed; and they even ascribe such qualities to the States that are the heirs of these past civilizations. These States are now proceeding along the same lines of post-civilizational technological development that the West has already undergone, hence they are no longer civilizations in the old sense.

As for the West itself, culturally considered, it is also no longer a civilization, though in most other respects, economic, political, military, scientific, technological and so on, the West is still maintaining its standing for the time

2 Harry Redner, *Beyond Civilization: Society, Culture and the Individual in the Age of Globalization* (New Brunswick USA: Transaction Publishers, 2013).

being. But this is not really relevant to the issues of civilization, since it must be stressed that civilization is first and foremost a cultural matter. Certainly, without a material and organizational basis a civilization cannot maintain itself, but what makes it a civilization are the values and qualities of civility that reside in its culture. A civilized person is above all a cultured human being.

If we focus on the role of culture in history then a very different account emerges than if we emphasize material and organizational factors. Effectively, this negates a Marxist reading of history, or at least revises it substantially. This is true no matter what period of history we focus on in order to start an analysis, and applies throughout all the crucial subsequent stages. If we take the Neolithic Revolution as the start of history, then it follows that a purely materialist account, such as we find in Marxist palaeo-archaeologists such as V. Gordon Childe and many others, must also be revised. In other words, the Neolithic Revolution was much more than a mere turning to agriculture and pastoralism, that is, a transformation of the mode of production, it was also a transformation of human culture. And this is precisely what the latest discoveries have revealed.

From the latest findings into the origins of the Neolithic Revolution, it can now be concluded that the crucial changes were cultural in nature and that they preceded the material changes, rather than vice-versa, as the conventional account has it. In other words, the Neolithic Revolution was a cultural revolution before it became an agricultural one. It is not that agriculture gave rise to a new kind of religion, but more likely that a new type of communal worship instigated a turning to agriculture. This is the view of the palaeoarchaeologist Jacques Cauvin who maintains that the invention of the gods came first, before the changes in sustenance through a new form of labour.³

This view has gained considerable support from the recent excavations at Göbekli Tepe in Southern Turkey, where, according to the leading palaeoarchaeologist, Klaus Schmidt: "The construction of a massive temple by a group of foragers is evidence that organized religion could come *before* the rise of agriculture and other aspects of civilization."⁴ Thus from the very start of historical development, all aspects of proto-civilization that made possible the much later origins of civilization proper are fundamentally linked to cultural factors and not just to material resources or social relations. The fact that we now command such huge resources and are socially and politically so well

3 Jacques Cauvin, *The Birth of the Gods and the Origins of Agriculture*, trans. Trevor Watkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

4 Klaus Schmidt, quoted in Charles C. Mann, "Birth of Religion", *National Geographic*, June 2011, 57.

organized makes not a jot of difference to our civilizational standing if in cultural respects we have fallen into the twilight of a Dark Age.

The Neolithic Revolution was the very first and perhaps the most decisive of all the cultural transformations that mankind has undergone in history. It was followed by three other cultural revolutions prior to the present stage of globalization. First, there came the beginnings of the early civilization; second, there ensued what Karl Jaspers has called the Axial Age or the start of the higher civilizations; and third, there was the origin of what might loosely be called Modernity, half a millennium ago within Western Civilization, that of Christian Europe around 1500.⁵

It so happened that Europe came first in the race for Modernity. But if for some counterfactual reason, Europe had been unable to fulfil this role, perhaps through a recurrence of the Black Death or because of Ottoman conquest, then one or other of the then extant civilizations would have done so somewhat later. Which of these might have been the one to develop? There is no telling as this is a purely hypothetical and speculative matter. We might point to Japan or China or India or Persia as already possessing many of the preconditions of Modernity in commerce, statecraft, technology and the rudiments of science. Could one of them have brought these together into the one coherent undertaking? There is no point in offering purely conjectural answers. What a non-Western Modernity might have been like is also a matter of historical imagination not susceptible of any demonstration. Whether it would have resulted in a world without the major problems facing humanity at present is, therefore, an unanswerable question.

Modernity was a unique development which could only occur once. Since it inevitably embraced the whole world, it contrasts sharply with the rise of civilization itself. This happened many times in different places at various historical dates. The issue of how many such early civilizations there were altogether, a problem that much preoccupied Arnold Toynbee, depends, of course, on what qualifies as a civilization and is not one that concerns us here; and neither is the question of why civilizations arose in the first place. We merely note it as a fact that the very earliest, such as Sumer and Egypt, were what Karl August Wittfogel has termed hydraulic civilizations, ones based on irrigation works, which rivers afford in dry regions, as in Mesopotamia and on the Nile.⁶ This also holds for the early civilizations of China on the Yellow River basin

5 Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, trans. Michael Bullock (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), 2.

6 Karl August Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New York: Random House, 1957).

and that of India on the Indus. The West, as we shall see, had a very different origin as a network of cities by the sea, and this meant that it developed in a different way. The fundamental divergence in development between East and West is what shall concern us most in this Part 1.

It is crucial to note from the very start that not everything in history falls into neat civilizational categories. There are all kinds of developments that transcend civilizational distinctions, such as common activities carried out by groups of people who are indifferent to the fact that they are separated by different civilizations. People can trade with each other and exchange religions or philosophies or sciences even though they are divided by civilizational boundaries and are culturally quite diverse in every other way. The people of the Mediterranean have been doing this ever since the fall of the Roman Empire and its replacement by at least three different civilizations. It is also the case that within the one political entity, such as an empire or large-scale state, there can be people of vastly different civilizational provenance, as was the case in the Persian Empire established by Cyrus and his Achaemenid successors, which contained Greeks, Jews, Egyptians, Syrians, Phoenicians and, of course, Persians and Medes, the ruling strata. What is even more crucial is that religions can easily cross over from one civilization to another, and these need not necessarily be universal faiths, for most religions can adapt themselves to different civilizations. This is also true of philosophies, scripts, styles of art and almost anything else one cares to mention. Thus, for example, Greek philosophy and art travelled over most of the Eurasian continents with the possible exception of the Far East, but even there, Buddhism brought in some of it, heavily disguised as Indian.

This means that it is possible for the one civilization to contain different religions, philosophies, styles of art, scripts, languages, political forms, economies, and almost anything else one cares to mention. Rome is a case in point of an extremely diverse and mixed civilization; by contrast, China was a very internally unified one. In China there was predominantly the one race of people, the Han, speaking different dialects of the one language and utilizing the one commonly understood script, and sharing indigenous religions and philosophies, with the exceptional importation of Buddhism. Even though Rome was a very varied civilization in just about all respects, there was a common Roman way of life, one based on city living with its amenities for common activities: the forum for law, government and trade, the amphitheatre and theatre for leisure pastimes and art, the baths for relaxation and reading, and the various kinds of schools for study. There was the participatory political status of being a citizen, a privilege granted to more and more people as time went on till it became universal for adult males.

It is clear from the example of Rome that our idea of a cultural ethos or way of life that defines a civilization is not very precise but, nevertheless, consistent. It makes the concept of civilization indispensable in accounting for large historical and cultural differences between people. It is easy to apply it in the early stages of the rise of civilizations when this occurred among people in different localities at different times. But as civilizations enlarge and spread, and as mixtures between them develop, then it becomes much more difficult to separate one from another. This is the reason that Spengler and Toynbee, who insist on seeing civilizations as distinct entities, have to resort to purely arbitrary constructions, such as Spengler's Magian or Toynbee's Syriac civilizations.⁷ Such supposed historical entities are of dubious value for they arise merely from the theoretical requirement that everything should be categorized in terms of distinct civilizations.

According to Spengler each civilization is almost hermetically sealed off from every other. Each is like a separate plant springing from its own racial soil and undergoing a predetermined quasi-biological life-cycle of youth, maturity, senescence and death. This organicist view of civilizations clearly derives from the racism and *Lebensphilosophie* of Spengler's time. It also leads him to apply to all civilizations in history the *Kultur-Zivilization* distinction current in German thought in his era and the stock-in-trade of German propaganda during the war. According to this idea, every society goes through an early *Kultur* phase followed by a late *Zivilization* phase, which is established with the formation of an empire embracing the territories across which the civilization has spread. This leads Spengler to a fruitless hunt for homologies in seeking to establish when these phases begin and end, and when the dividing imperial caesura took place. On this basis, he arrives at what are obviously absurd conclusions to specialist scholars of the different civilizations, which they did not hesitate to point out to him. But he was not fazed by any such criticism.

Toynbee, too, went in for a hunt for homologies and produced tables setting them out to his own, but hardly anyone else's, satisfaction. However, he did correct some of Spengler's worst errors. Spengler had broken up Western Civilization into two halves, each of which he deemed a quite separate civilization. The first he took to be the Classical Apollonian civilization of Greece and Rome and the second the Christian Faustian one of Europe, with the second having not much to do with the first. And, as if this fragmentation of Western Civilization were not enough, Spengler separates Byzantium from either of the two halves and treats it as belonging to his quite distinct Magian civilization.

7 See Harry Redner, *Beyond Civilization*, op. cit. 11, 44, 303, 323, 330.

Toynbee is obviously unhappy with this division of the history of Christianity before and after the fall of Rome into distinct religions belonging to different civilizations. But instead of simply abandoning the whole Spenglerian schema he tries to rectify it by linking the separate halves into a generational sequence of first, second and third generations; Minoan civilization is the first generation, Classical civilization is the second, and the European Christian the third. Linking the latter two is the history of Christianity, which is formed in the chrysalis of the Roman Empire and transcends its fall and the resultant Dark Age interregnum, to be reborn in Christian Europe. Thus, an Augustinian view of the City of God is joined to a Spenglerian schema of the fall of civilizations.

Neither Spengler nor Toynbee took any account of what Karl Jaspers later defined as the Axial Age, the almost concurrent rise of the great universalist religions and philosophies, which took place in Greece, Israel, India, China and Persia during the period 700 to 300 BCE. Jaspers followed some suggestions along these lines provided by his friend and mentor Max Weber. Neither Spengler nor Toynbee took any notice of Weber and this is a damaging omission in their work on civilization. It is not possible to write on civilization without taking account of Weber's treatment of the fundamental differentiating factors of Western and Eastern civilizations. The same point holds for Jaspers' idea of the Axial Age, which Toynbee fails to mention. In what follows we shall seek to do justice to both these crucial historical thinkers.

But perhaps an even worse failure in both Spengler and Toynbee, due to their fixation on homologies, is that it made them oblivious to the utterly different character of the modern West, which does not fit into any of their civilizational schemas, because it cannot be likened to anything that happened in the previous history of civilizations. The West, due to its recent developments over the last four centuries, is not like any other civilization; it is not simply another specimen of the genus civilization comprising twenty-one species, according to Toynbee. Perhaps it could still be seen in those terms if one restricts oneself to the medieval and even Renaissance period, but not once it entered into what is called Modernity. For it was then that there arose what we have elsewhere called the Forces of Modernity, namely modern capitalism, the modern State, science and technology, and these later began their expansion right across the whole globe, so that now they are universally prevalent.⁸

All this was utterly unprecedented in history and it means that out of Western Civilization there has developed a new historical stage for the whole of mankind. Not only is this a turning away from all previous civilizations, but also a

⁸ Ibid, 109.

turning away from civilization as such. For what eventuated in the West, at least from the late twentieth century onwards, has been a process of civilizational self-dissolution, as this civilization has developed the Forces of Modernity to a stage where they have consumed the very civilization that gave them birth. Western Civilization is destroying itself in transforming itself into a globalized entity, which in an earlier work referred to above I have described as a state "beyond civilization".⁹ This is not the collapse of civilization back into barbarism, which has occurred before and is a regression into a pre-civilizational stage, but the transformation of civilization into a post-civilizational stage, a possibility never encountered before. To explain how and why this has taken place will be the main burden of our account.

Neither Spengler nor Toynbee could even begin to grasp what was taking place already in their own time because they did not possess the kind of sociological, economic and scientific knowledge required to appreciate the magnitude of the changes that were taking place, due to the Forces of Modernity. Toynbee was fully aware of his own lack in this respect:

Looking, from this point of view, at my range of knowledge, I am ruefully aware that my classical education has left me almost entirely ignorant of modern Western discoveries, from the seventeenth century onwards, in the field of mathematics and physical science. This is indeed a blank.¹⁰

However, he believed that his ignorance did not matter because Western civilization was in all crucial respects no different from any other. Hence, he goes on as follows:

It is true that this personal ignorance about some of the characteristic achievements of Western Civilization in its modern age is a serious handicap to an understanding of the Western society's modern genius. But, after all, Western Civilization is only one of a number of specimens of the species of society that it represents; and its history is still unfinished. At a pinch, therefore, we could dispense with the Western specimen in making a comparative study of civilizations.¹¹

9 Ibid, 331–2.

10 Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History, Vol. 12: Reconsiderations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 591.

11 Ibid, 591.

In other words, Toynbee maintains that Western Modernity has introduced nothing radically new into the history of civilizations, which unfolds as it has always done with or without the West. For Toynbee there is nothing special about the West; as he states: "I reject the pretensions of Western civilization to be a unique representative of the species: the only civilization worthy of the name."¹² This is fair enough, for the West is certainly not the only civilization. However, it is the only one to embark on the unique development of a radical Modernity, and this Toynbee also denies: "If one rejects the Western Civilization's general pretensions of uniqueness, one will be critical of any particular pretensions to uniqueness that one finds this civilization making a particular province of its domain or in particular fields of its activity."¹³ And this is clearly wrong in the light of the West's achievements in science alone, of which Toynbee pleads ignorance, as well as in many other fields that we have called the Forces of Modernity.

What a fundamental difference this attitude to the West makes is evident by comparison with Weber, who clearly sets out the rationalization and intellectualization processes that have led to the disenchantment of the world in the West, and there alone. But unfortunately, Toynbee had no knowledge of Weber and no interest in sociology. Toynbee felt that he already knew all he needed to know about the West and that sociology would add nothing worthwhile to this:

Then, as far as I do want to know about Western Civilization, I feel that I can imbibe this knowledge through my pores since, after all, this is the cultural atmosphere in which I live and move. My third reason for deliberately neglecting the West is that the historical and sociological information about the West is voluminous out of all proportion to its value for a comparative study of civilization.¹⁴

According to Toynbee, sociology, like history, merely provides information; there is, apparently, no theoretical value in pursuing this science for the purpose of civilizational studies. It is this attitude that we aim to counteract.

Toynbee claims that he is not interested in the West as it "is an imperfect specimen of its species because its history is still unfinished."¹⁵ As for its future, his eye for homological patterns in the development of civilization leads him to wonder firstly, whether it will lead to a coming "Westernization of the world

¹² Ibid, 626.

¹³ Ibid, 628.

¹⁴ Ibid, 595.

¹⁵ Ibid, 595.

... a common civilization for the whole human race;"¹⁶ and secondly, whether this ecumenical civilization will develop into a universal state. On the first point, he has no doubt that "this coming ecumenical civilization would necessarily start its career within a Western framework and on a Western basis by reason of its Western origins ..." ¹⁷ On the second point he is not so sure:

... we cannot foretell whether or not the Western Civilization is ever going to enter into a universal state, as both the Hellenic and Sinic did, still less can we foretell whether, if the future course of Western affairs were to follow the pattern that is a common Helleno-Sinic one up to that point the West's universal state would be short-lived as the Hellenic Civilization's was in the western provinces of the Roman Empire, or as long-lived as the Sinic universal state has been.¹⁸

In setting himself these two problems Toynbee has been following precedents from the past and this is invariably a bad course to follow when considering the unprecedented nature of current developments. As we shall try to show, on both counts Toynbee has gone wrong. There is no question of any coming ecumenical civilization based on an extension of Western Civilization to the whole world since the very being and continuity of Western Civilization is now in question. What the West has passed on to the world is not its civilization as a coherent whole, but only that component of its Modernity that constitutes the Forces of Modernity, namely, modern capitalism, the modern State, science and technology. And since these aspects of the civilization of the West are now proliferating in the rest of the world, this is leading to conflicts that are potentially even more dangerous than those that prevailed in the twentieth century in Europe and elsewhere. Hence, at present there is no question of the world becoming unified in a universal state. Relying on homologies has clearly led Toynbee astray in considering the contemporary situation.

Another homology to which Toynbee turns is equally misleading, namely the one that is based on the Augustinian conception of the City of God. Toynbee interprets this historically as an example of his chrysalis thesis that universal religions are nursed in the bosom of decaying and disintegrating civilization, and that they rise phoenix-like from the ashes to form the foundations of new civilizations. This is obviously modelled on the rise and growth of Christianity within the collapsing Roman Empire and its persistence through

16 Ibid, 529.

17 Ibid, 529.

18 Ibid, 518.

the subsequent Dark Ages to provide the basis of civilization during its resurrection as medieval Europe. Hence, following his Augustinian vision, Toynbee maintains that no matter what might happen to Western Civilization, the Christian religion will always survive since mankind cannot do without religious faith, as he puts it:

This means that however grievously the trustees of the historic higher religions may have abused their religions' mandate, the mandate itself has not been forfeited unless and until mankind is presented with some new way or ways of life that offer to human souls more effective spiritual help than the historic higher religions can give them.¹⁹

Thus, he is able to conclude on this confident note:

The Western Civilization may or may not be in decline in our time; contemporary Westerners are not in a position to diagnose their own civilization's prospects. But whatever this particular civilization's present prospects may be, a recovery of the essence of religion, if this has been lost, is needed at all times and in all social situations. It is needed because human beings cannot live without it.²⁰

It is all very well to say that Man cannot live by bread alone, but what if not only bread or its other material equivalents, but also circuses or other spectacles and shows that divert people, were readily provided for everyone? Would such people still long for the essence of religion? Toynbee was perhaps not fully aware in his time of all the other sights and satisfactions on offer in our time, both on and off screen. We can be far less sanguine now about the survival of a true faith that Toynbee on Augustinian premises takes for granted. In our time we see religions taking perverse forms of fundamentalism which are more like a resurgence of primitive cults than revivals of the higher religions from which they derive. The practice of religion of a more spiritual kind is made increasingly more difficult in a world of detached and atomized individuals – the world that is arising out of the destruction of community and family life, the pressures of mass entertainment and the media, ideological politics, and impersonal social relations. To assume that the higher religions

¹⁹ Ibid, 534.

²⁰ Ibid, 534.

must necessarily survive, as Toynbee does, seems more like an act of faith than realistic history or sociology.

Much the same conclusion holds for civilization in general. Both Toynbee and Spengler took it for granted that as one civilization falls, another will always rise to take its place, for civilization as such is imperishable, even though every single one is doomed to destruction. But that faith in civilization can also no longer be maintained. Civilization in the cultural sense could disappear even though "civilization" in the material sense might continue to flourish. For this to happen it is not necessary to imagine some catastrophe that would bring about a return to barbarism, such as people usually suppose is meant by the expression "the end of civilization". An end of civilization could take place without the vast majority of people even noticing that it is taking place.

This is, in fact, what is happening at present as young people, the so-called new millennials, are behaving as if culture was a matter of consuming cultural commodities, as if communication is what happens by means of Facebook, and as if history is something to do with "dead white males". The young, of course, are not to blame for this outcome, which has been brought about by decades of the cheapening and debasement of education, by the mass media and the stupefaction of minds that it has brought about, by the corruption of politics that has turned democracy into a popularity poll for celebrities, and by many more such culture-sapping developments. And the process continues as new technologies are invented that enable greater control of whole populations, or ones that intrude into individual lives and make privacy a thing of the past, and there are some in preparation that could turn human bodies into so-called "cyborgs" or mind and machine couplings. To remain human will become more of a challenge in coming times as human nature itself is being attacked. Civilization is but one aspect of an even greater threat to humanity itself.

Few are aware of the dangers ahead. At present it has become difficult even to warn about them without being condemned as some sort of inveterate pessimist. Who wants to listen to someone who argues that what we are now experiencing is an evacuation of the meaning of civilization? Historians still speak blithely of Western Civilization, Islamic Civilization, a "war of civilizations" as if nothing had fundamentally changed in the last century or so. Others who hold that crucial changes have occurred speak in turn of "global" civilization or "technological" civilization or in some other such generalizing locutions. Neither side realizes that the term "civilization" is no longer applicable in anything like its old sense. A "war of civilizations" cannot occur because there are no civilizations left to engage in such a war; some other entities, whatever one might wish to call them, are now battling for supremacy. A "technological"

civilization is also not possible because technology cannot give rise to civilization, since that is exclusively a cultural matter, not a technical one.

It is in this sense of culture that we speak of the twilight of a cultural Dark Age. We do not mean by that anything like the Dark Ages that followed the fall of the Roman Empire in the West. Indeed, what is happening now is in material and organizational respects the opposite of what then took place. Then cities were depopulated, now they are larger than ever before; then the economy was devastated, now it is growing to unparalleled heights; then there was a failure of law and order, now it is more enforced than ever before; then science and scholarship lapsed, now they flourish more than ever; then the arts became depleted, now they are superabundant; and so on for all major aspects of social life. What this means is that life after civilization will be nothing like life prior to civilization, it will be the opposite of it. It will be like the life we are coming to experience now, only more so. What will be absent will be the cultural, spiritual, ethical, artistic, and intellectual standards associated with people leading a civilized way of life.

Is the passing of civilization in this sense to be regretted? Should we be doing anything to stop it from happening or at least to slow it up? Most people now obviously do not miss civilization and if questioned they no longer even know what this means, for they are quite content with what they now have and want nothing more. It is becoming increasingly difficult for those who no longer have any experience or memory of civilization to know what they are losing. Any attempt to convince them to retain what they still have left of civilization generally falls on deaf ears.

Hence, one can only appeal to those, necessarily a small minority, who still feel a need for something different, something better and finer than what can be procured on the commercial markets or the marketplace of ideas. These are people who feel a void in their lives that cannot be filled by media products, or the information afforded to everyone by the internet, or the education which a few can afford to buy if they are wealthy enough. These are the people we aim to address in the hope of making a small difference to their thinking which might translate to their living as well.

This is as much as can be said in a brief introduction, in order to avoid obvious misunderstandings. A better understanding will have to be acquired from the book itself. We begin that expository process by turning to history and outlining the stages through which humanity passed in order to arrive at its present predicament. Was all this historically inevitable or some sort of accident of history? This is a question we do not even dare to ask at this stage, but perhaps later we might derive some insight into it.

The Ages and Stages of History

1 Land and Sea Civilizations

History has proceeded from the paleolithic stages of humanity to the present through four epochal transitions, each in its own way momentous for the destiny of mankind: the Neolithic Agricultural Revolution, the rise of civilizations and Axial Age origins of the Higher Religions and Philosophies, the age of Modernity, and finally the present Globalization Age. Whether Globalization marks the end of Modernity and the start of something that has been called post-Modernity, or whether it is the initiation of something else that some have called “technological civilization”, is still hidden in the future course of destiny, about which we can only guess at present. However, we can be sure that some fundamental change is being inaugurated in our time, even though we do not know where it might lead in the long run.

The latest of these epochal developments have been unique occurrences taking place predominantly in the West, whereas the earliest were recurring incidents scattered across different areas of the earth at different times. Thus, the Neolithic Revolution occurred first in the Middle East and spread from there to regions in Europe and India; but there were also many independent agricultural developments at various times and places all over the earth where crops can grow. Analogously, though the earliest civilizations also started in the Middle East, in Mesopotamia and in Egypt, many other civilizations arose later in other regions on all the major continents, except for Australia, though nowhere near as many as distinct cultures. The Axial Age High Cultures were even rarer and only occurred five times during approximately the same period between 700 and 300 BCE in Greece, Israel, Persia, India and China. Finally, Modernity was a unique occurrence that took place in Europe alone, starting around 1500 CE; but it eventually spread all over the globe thereby giving rise to Globalization, which one can formally date either to 1945 when the United Nations Organization was established or more informally to the unification taking place throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of the whole of mankind through political, economic and technological developments, the last of these culminating around 2000 CE with the establishment of the Internet that links all people on earth.

In this work we shall be mainly concerned with Globalization and the effects that it has had on Culture, though we shall also turn back to Modernity

as this provided the basis and preconditions for what subsequently ensued, since without it Globalization could not have occurred. Modernity, as we shall show, was the last phase of Western Civilization, both its culmination and its conclusion. It was during this period that the crucial developments took place in Europe that placed it in the forefront of all the other civilizations then still current, such as the Islamic, the Chinese or Far Eastern in general, and the Russian which was a variant of the Byzantine. Modernity began with the discovery of America as this inaugurated the Age of Exploration, and with the two concurrent cultural revolutions, the Renaissance and the Reformation. Our major interest is, however, not with these initiating events but with what came out of them: the formation of an advanced form of capitalism, the foundation of absolutist monarchy as the earliest form of the modern State, with the birth of modern science in the Scientific Revolution and the start of all the technical inventions that led to the Industrial Revolution and to which we owe our present technologies. We have called these the Forces of Modernity.

Regarding the rise of the Forces of Modernity, the main issue that will concern us in what follows is why this occurred in the West and not in the East, which until this point had civilizations which in many respects were more developed than that of Europe. Debates surrounding this question are most often focussed on Song China which evinced remarkable accomplishments in technology, production, trade, art, philosophy and other cultural matters. Nevertheless, it did not succeed in giving rise to anything approaching modern science or capitalism or the art, philosophy and politics of the Renaissance. What was it that held it back by comparison with the West, which at the start of the second millennium, contemporary with the Song, was still extremely backward and barely out of the Dark Ages? Our question does not assume that China or some other civilization could not have attained something comparable to Modernity, or that it would not have done so sooner or later. We are merely asking why this happened first in the West. In fact, we might even phrase the question differently and ask why it did not happen sooner in the West itself. Many of the essential predispositions for Modernity were already present in the Roman Empire, yet they did not go any further, and nearly all went backwards and eventually disappeared. An almost completely new start had to be made in medieval Europe.

From the very start, Western Civilization distinguished itself from all others in that it was a civilization of the sea located on the Mediterranean littoral whereas all the others at that time were civilizations of alluvial river valleys. The civilizations established on the Euphrates and Tigris, on the Nile, on the Indus, on the Yellow River, between the Oxus and Jaxartes were all what Karl August Wittfogel calls hydraulic civilizations where the main role of government was

to regulate the flow of water for irrigation.¹ All of them generated systems of authority that Weber calls Patrimonial and that Wittfogel names with the older term, now almost banned on account of its political incorrectness, Oriental Despotism. This constituted a particular type of civilizational structure that embraced all aspects of social life, politics, economics, religion, art and culture in general. According to Wittfogel, once such a comprehensive system was developed in the riparian setting, it could be transferred to all other ecological conditions, ones where agriculture could be conducted without any irrigation, by rainfall alone. Hence, this is not a climate or ecology-based account of civilization. Indeed, Oriental Despotisms have proliferated throughout the world in all ages, and some, according to Wittfogel survived till the twentieth century, a theme we shall take up presently.

By contrast to what was generally the case in the East, in the West civilization first began on the island of Crete and the Greek archipelago. From the start this Minoan civilization was based on sea power as a thalassocracy. The Western civilizations that followed were equally thalassocracies. The next one, after the Minoan-Mycenean was overthrown and a Dark Age ensued, was begun by the Phoenicians according to what Fernand Braudel terms “the miracle of Phoenician voyages, the first systematic use of the sea ...”² This involved the establishment of colonies as autonomous city states all over the Western Mediterranean regions connected to the mother cities in the Levant and to each other by networks of trade. The Greeks took up this pattern and established colonies all over the Mediterranean and Black Sea shores. This dispersed form of settlement would form the core of Greek civilization out of which emerged the polis as the constituent element of this world.

The Phoenicians endowed the Greeks with much more than a colonizing and commercial pattern of settlement and trade; they gave them the gift of the alphabet, which, adapted to the Greek language, enabled them to develop literature, art and science, and also brought them in touch with those from the East. This thereby became the basis of the so-called Greek miracle, the brightest efflorescence of culture in any civilization, and it was to have long-lasting consequences all over the world. In the form of Greek philosophy, it was the complement to the other universal creeds that were simultaneously arising in Israel, Persia, India and China, with eponymous thinkers such as Pythagoras and Heraclitus, who were close contemporaries of Isaiah the prophet, of

1 Karl August Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).

2 Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean in the Ancient World*, trans. Sian Reynolds (Penguin, London, 2002), 215.

Zoroaster (if in fact there was such a person), the Buddha, Lao Tzu (though it is also questionable if he existed), and Confucius, though he was a little later. This is the period Karl Jaspers has termed the Axial Age.

The Greeks were settled all around the shores of the sea like frogs around a pond, as Plato puts it. They established cities that were more than just walled enclosures, but formed autonomous social units of a different kind from all previous types of cities. Nearly all the fundamental elements of Western Culture were pioneered in these poleis, never more so than in Athens, the foremost among them. It was there that Western politics, art, philosophy, science and technology made a start. Maintaining this legacy has given the West a head-start over any civilization that had no access to the Greek heritage. Alexander's conquests in the East spread Greek influence far and wide throughout Egypt, the Middle East, Persia, Central Asia and as far as India, but it was thinly spread and mostly did not last. Very much later, in the East the Arabs became its main beneficiaries; fortunately, they preserved some of its knowledge when the West was sunk in barbarian and Christian stupor after the fall of the Roman Empire.

Rome was the main successor and possessor of Greek civilization. It was the Romans who united the cities of the Mediterranean into the one empire. If Rome had not done so, then some other city would have, or it might have been Alexander, had he had the time and opportunity to go west and conquer the western Mediterranean as well as the eastern. But there is no doubt that Rome contributed to Western Civilization many things that a Greek empire might not have accomplished. In the practical aspects of organizing the social life of large populations, the Romans proved themselves to be incomparable masters. We owe them vast architectural and engineering works and a systematic body of rulings known as Roman Law.

However, even though Rome took up the Greek scientific achievements, it did not take them much further. It has often been questioned why the undoubted technological principles discovered by scientists in Alexandria and elsewhere were not put to productive use. The answer that labour saving devices were not necessary in a slave economy is clearly inadequate since even slaves were expensive to buy and maintain. Perhaps a better answer is that rational economic calculations of costs and benefits were not practiced by Roman owners of latifundia and other productive enterprises. A capitalist mentality had not yet been developed. Rome did have extensive production and sea-trade and a form of capitalism that Weber calls "political capitalism" based on tax farming, but that did not approach the economic rationality of free market capitalism of modern Europe, which Weber sets out and which

we shall presently discuss.³ The differences between these forms of capitalism are not widely understood by historians and even Braudel gets it wrong, as we shall show.

After the fall of Rome, the European civilization that emerged out of the interregnum of the Dark Ages was a far more continental region than it had previously been when it centred on the whole of the Mediterranean. Cities grew in the interior especially along the major river routes: Rhone, Rhine and Danube. Nevertheless, the major economic flow came from the Mediterranean with the resumption of trade by the Italian cities Amalfi, Venice, Genoa and Pisa. The mostly luxury goods imported went north along tortuous and unwieldy land routes over the Alps and through the inland cities, such as Augsburg and Nuremberg in Germany.

However, a second manufacturing and trading system began to grow in the north, based on the North Sea with the Baltic as its annex. It, too, was carried out by autonomous and more or less independent cities, which eventually coalesced into an integrated trading network called the Hanseatic League. The main Hansa depot cities or *kontors* stretched from London in the west to Novgorod in the east and from Bergen in the north to Cologne in the south, with altogether 200 cities joining at one time or another; they held 74 assemblies or Diets to regulate their common affairs, 54 of which met in Lübeck on the Baltic. By the fourteenth century the two seas systems of cities began to link up by sea as well as by land when Venetian galleys sailed past the pillars of Hercules into the Atlantic and the English Channel as far as Bruges in Flanders. This revolutionized the economy of Europe, as Lincoln Paine writes:

Between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, Europe underwent a metamorphosis. For thousands of years, the sub-continent had divided the Mediterranean from the North Sea and the Baltic, but by the fourteenth century a combination of sea and river routes connected all shores of Europe and made it one of the most vibrant, if not the richest, trading network in the world.⁴

A manifest symbol of that relation between the two seas is Van Eyck's Arnolfini marriage portrait painted in 1434, now in the London National Gallery, that

3 See John Love, *Antiquity and Capitalism, Max Weber and the Sociological Foundations of Roman Civilization* (London: Routledge, 1991).

4 Lincoln Paine, *The Sea and Civilization: A Maritime History of the World* (New York: Knopf, 2013), 345.

celebrates the union of two trading families in Bruges and Florence, then the two main manufacturing centres in Europe.

Once again, as during the time of the Greeks and Romans, European civilization was based on independent or semi-dependent cities trading across vast distances by sea. But by this stage Europe had become a two seas civilization and would eventually go on to become three seas when the Atlantic Ocean was navigated and America was discovered and its eastern shores settled. From start to finish, free cities with access to the open seas is what would distinguish the civilization of the West from those of the East.

The cities of the East were never free; and even at their most productive and expansive when trading by sea, they were always subject to embargoes and controls by a central power whose rulers could open or shut them at will. This is most evident in China during the Song dynasty period when Europe was just beginning to get under way. China was then in almost every way vastly superior to Europe. At the time of the Southern Song, having been driven out of most of inland China by the Jurchen barbarians, the dynasty was concentrated in the coastal areas in cities such as Hangzhou and Quanzhou for the very first time in China's history. This made the rulers more than ever reliant on trade by sea and the manufacturing that this required. The Chinese dominated the trading routes in the South China Sea down to the Malay Peninsula and the island of Java. But with the unification of China under the Mongol Yuan dynasty and their successors the Ming, the whole attitude to foreign trade began to change. At first under the Mongols overseas trade even expanded and vastly surpassed that carried on in Europe, as Marco Polo reports. But the Mongols proved more interested in conquest than trade and invaded first Japan and then Java which had adverse consequences on their trade. But the complete blockage only occurred when the native Ming dynasty ousted the Mongols, for then the Ming Taizu Emperor, as he was known, closed off all the port cities of China with a single edict in 1371 which declared that "not even a little plank is allowed to drift to the sea".⁵ Such a thing would never have been possible in Europe.

It is true that what was blocked could also be unblocked, and then blocked again as the emperors deemed fit. So, between 1405 and 1433 the Emperor Ming Chengzu launched vast sea expeditions, under his admiral Zheng He, to the southern lands as far as India, Arabia and Africa. However, the aim of those ventures in force was not trade but tribute. They were designed to overawe native rulers and bring them into the Chinese sphere of influence.

⁵ Ibid, 367.

In brief, they were massive exercises in showing the flag that in the long run proved ruinous and were discontinued when Chengzu, the Yongle emperor, shifted the capital from Naing to Beijing in 1421. From then on China once more went into commercial isolation with a second, even more severe embargo on sea trade in 1430, when even foreign traders were banned from visiting China.

This made it more or less inevitable that Europeans would sail to China rather than Chinese sailing to Europe. Thus, the die was cast ensuring that the Europeans, not the Chinese, would explore and eventually conquer the world. In the process of doing so, they discovered and settled America. This had a profound impact on the emergence of Modernity in Europe rather than in China or elsewhere in Asia. The inflow of bullion from America and wares from colonial outposts all over the world, spurred international and local trade and manufacture. This in turn helped to consolidate and further mercantile forms of capitalism and the practices of mercantilism as national policy in the newly developing states of Europe. The modern State was thereby enabled to establish itself on the basis of the feudal kingdoms as absolutist monarchies, with Spain, France and England as the first and most important, but many others followed. Military establishments grew proportionate to the territorial and financial powers that accrued to these monarchs through expropriation, conquests and colonies. Science and technology also gained from the opening of the world through exploration because of all the new products and people this made available for study, and because of all the problems it engendered in shipbuilding, navigation and all the other ancillary activities.

Gradually as Europe settled the seaboard of the Atlantic coast of America and established outposts on the shores of Africa, it was transformed: from a medieval two-seas civilization it changed into the modern three-seas one, which it has more or less remained ever since. A triangular system of trade based on Negro slavery was established between Europe, Africa and the two Americas as well as the Caribbean islands. But this does not mean that Europe was dependent on slaves, as Rome had been, or that it would not have developed without resorting to slavery, as it might well have done had anyone foreseen the future consequences. For slavery was but one ingredient in the migratory and colonizing effort of the European people in America. Out of this in North America there arose the United States of America which came to occupy the whole continental area from coast to coast. In the twentieth century it became the leading power of Western Civilization, the head of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization which more or less embraces most of the countries that constitute the West at present.

2 Oriental Despotism

While the West sailed across the globe and embarked on the new civilizational venture of Modernity, the East was stuck in the doldrums of static Oriental Despotisms. Six such empires stretched between Europe and the Pacific: the Czarist, Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal, Ming and Tokugawa. All of them were militarily expansionist and sought conquests abroad, but internally within their own territories they were repressive and intolerant of change, intent on maintaining a fixed social order backed by religious orthodoxy. The Muscovites under Ivan III and Ivan IV were constantly gaining territory from the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth in the west and the Muslim emirates in the east, while remaining in Byzantine and Mongol influenced stupor. The Ottomans were challenging the Habsburg Catholic emperors both in the Balkans and the Mediterranean, but they were Sunni Islamist rulers, had a Turkish tribal mentality and ruled a polyglot religiously mixed population of Muslims, Christians and Jews, each carefully safeguarding its orthodoxy. The Safavids, their Shia counterparts in Persia, had newly come to power, after centuries of Mongol Ilkhan and Timurid rule, on the strength of their religious fervour, and so were intent on expanding their sectarian denomination to all Muslims, but this led to incessant wars with the Ottomans, a little like the religious wars of Catholics and Protestants in the West. In India the Mughals from Central Asia under Babur, who claimed descent from Genghis Kahn, were just beginning their conquests of the whole sub-continent, and they also, like the Ottomans, ruled a mixed population of Hindus, Muslims and many other sects. In the Far East, a few centuries before this time the Ming had already seized power from the Yuan dynasty and were chasing the Mongols in the interior of Asia, oblivious of what was taking place on the seas around them. The Japanese under the newly established rule of Hideyoshi attacked Korea but were defeated and under his successor, Tokugawa Ieyasu, established a permanent shogunate that isolated itself from the world.

All of these six empires were ruled by what Wittfogel considers to be variants of Oriental Despotism. It therefore behoves us to step back in time and consider the origins and subsequent developments of this form of government which was typical of the civilizations of the East. For that purpose, we will turn to Weber who develops the still more general notion of Patrimonialism, which is also to be found in the West, so that Oriental Despotism can be taken as simply the Eastern form of Patrimonialism. Whether in the East or the West, according to Weber "the majority of the great continental empires had a fairly strong patrimonial character until and even after the beginning of modern

times.”⁶ And, as we shall see, there are regimes with strong patrimonial features even at present.

Patrimonialism is perhaps the oldest and longest lasting way of ruling and organizing large-scale societies ever devised in human history, for its roots go back to the very origins of civilization. The Pharaonic regime in ancient Egypt is the most typical of these early forms of government. This was a hydraulic civilization based on regulating the annual flooding of the Nile, which required organization and the exercise of authority at both a local and national level. The Pharaoh was the ruler who held absolute authority over the whole Nile area that was cultivable.

The Pharaoh was a god-like figure who treated the whole State as his private property like an estate. Everything in it belongs to him, land as much as people, who in theory are his servants, totally subject to his will and dictates. In practice it is, of course, another matter since the exercise of such absolute power is hemmed in by traditional constraints of a religious and customary kind. Nevertheless, the Patrimonial ruler has enormous power for all the instruments of rule belong to him:

For political administration is treated purely as a personal affair of the ruler, and political power is considered part of his personal property, which can be exploited by means of contribution and fear. The exercise of power is therefore extremely discretionary, at least in so far as it is not more or less limited by the ubiquitous intervention of sacred tradition.⁷

In practice the power of the patrimonial ruler depends on his ability to control his army. If his hold over his military commanders falters, especially over his personal retainers or bodyguard, then invariably his hold on power is compromised and he is deposed or murdered. Accordingly, “to an extreme extent, this was the fate of rulers in a classic locale of patrimonial armies, the Near East, which was also the classic location of ‘sultanism’.”⁸

Sultanism prevailed throughout the whole history of Muslim rule, even down to the present day. The common practice of employing slave armies as a personal military force, *mamelukes* recruited from Circassians or Turks, so as not to have to rely on Arabs or fellow Muslims, made ruling extremely precarious. For the slave soldiers were apt to seize power for themselves in any crisis

⁶ Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 2, eds. G. Roth and C. Wittich (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1978), 1013.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1028.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1020.

situation and rule as sultans. This happened time and time again. Even the Janissaries of the Ottoman Caliphs, extracted as children from Christian families in lieu of taxation, were often a danger to their overlord, and in the end had to be exterminated when they failed to seize power in the course of an insurrection. It is because Oriental Despotism was viewed by Western observers from Machiavelli onwards as a species of sultanism that it eventually received such a bad name. But similar phenomena were also at work in the West, particularly during the disastrous middle phase of the Roman Empire during the third century when the Praetorian Guard made and unmade emperors almost at will.

Patrimonialism, even if it did not often degenerate into sultanism, was a common feature of Western rule as well as Eastern. In Rome, it became the established form of government in the late third century as a counter to the prevailing instability of that time and was instituted by Diocletian and carried on by all the subsequent emperors. The change was signalled by the symbolism of the emperor being addressed as “dominus” and mandatory prostration before him demanded. He was no longer referred to as prince or “princeps”, first among equals; it was then that the system of Roman rule is said to have changed from the Principate to the Dominate. In keeping with this transition, the whole administrative apparatus of the empire was transformed into what Weber calls a “patrimonial bureaucracy”. Such a form of management had already existed in Ancient Egypt and it has kept on perpetuating itself ever since. What it amounts to is that the officials are treated as the ruler’s personal servants and form part of his extended household. Consequently, the ruler can appoint and dismiss them at will, reward or punish them as he chooses; under sultanism dismissal often amounts to a sentence of death for the highest official or vizier.

Thus, in almost every respect patrimonial bureaucracy differs from the rational-legal one, though an absolute contrast between the two types of administration only exists as ideal types; in actual practice and in historical reality the two are often mixed and all kinds of variations and intermediate forms have existed and are still evident at present. A particular example that was of great interest to Weber, as it was to all previous theorists of Oriental Despotism, was the method of recruitment of officials in imperial China. They were the Mandarins who were appointed and promoted on the basis of examinations which tested their literary skills and proficiency in Confucian ethical philosophy. Something analogous to this is still evident at present in the testing of Party apparatchiks in their proficiency in Marxism and the thought of Mao and Xi Jinping.

Historically the administration in China, like every other patrimonial bureaucracy, arose from the urgent necessity to cope with two perennial problems that had troubled China from time immemorial: the regulation of river flow in view of constant flooding, and to keep back the barbarians sweeping in from the northern steppes. The first problem required the building of dykes and canals, the second the building of walls. Both necessitated recruiting and organizing a huge peasant force of labourers, which called for officials:

... the power of patrimonial officialdom was based on river regulation, especially canal construction – at least in northern and central China – and on tremendous military fortification, again these projects were only possible through the intense use of compulsory labour, and through the use of magazines for storing payments in kind, from which officials drew their benefices and the army its equipment and provisions.⁹

It is by means of rule through officials that the Chinese emperors put an end to feudalism and maintained the unity of the empire, so that even when it occasionally broke apart, it could be rapidly restored once again as dynasty followed on dynasty.

Chinese officialdom differed from the usual run of patrimonial bureaucracies as well as from the modern type of rational-legal administration. As against the former type, Mandarins had to be educationally qualified for office through examinations. But as against the modern type, that education was not of the formal professional or practical type, but purely literary and philosophical-ethical. Modern officials, by contrast, are educated through university courses that are usually of the social or natural scientific variety. Chinese candidates for office had to provide for their own education, for the government only arranged for them to sit exams and took no responsibility for how they acquired the knowledge necessary to pass them; whereas the modern State provides universities for that purpose. This reflects the different roles that the two types of officials play in the culture in general. The Mandarins were gentlemen scholars who bore within themselves the highest values and standards of bearing and discrimination valued in Chinese culture, they were literally the *Kulturträger*. As Weber puts it: The unity of Chinese culture is essentially the unity of the status group which is the bearer of the bureaucratic literary education and the Confucian ethic with its ideal of gentility.¹⁰

9 Ibid, 1047.

10 Ibid, 1050.

In the West, the time is long past when a degree in classics or philosophy is all that is called for in becoming a civil servant or colonial administrator; now a much more mundane and indeed “philistine” approach to learning obtains. The only ethical standard expected of our bureaucrats is the professional ethic that goes with the job, nothing more than that is called for.

Even though Chinese civilization is very different from Western civilization, it is by no means inferior; it is simply different and in its own way no less accomplished. Hence the stock animadversions made against Oriental Despotism as unchanging, static and incapable of progress are simply not true. Weber is almost never guilty of falling into such attitudes and making such invidious comparisons between China and the West, but Wittfogel falls into such errors all too often, as when he makes the following sweeping generalization:

Hydraulic society is the outstanding case of social stagnation. Probably originating in several ways and under favourable circumstances developing semi-complex and complex patterns of property and social stratification, hydraulic society did not abandon its basic structure except under the impact of external forces.¹¹

If all that Wittfogel means to say is that, for example, in China no legally enshrined private property rights existed, that it did not have a distinctive bourgeois class formation, or that it did not have fully developed capitalism, then this is undoubtedly correct. But from this it does not follow that China, particularly during the Song period, did not develop an outstanding economy based on manufacturing for export, or create remarkable technologies that were ahead of anything comparable in the West at that time, some of which the West acquired from China later. During this period in China there were outstanding creative accomplishments in the arts and in philosophy, particularly in painting and among the thinkers of the New Confucian movement. Whatever Wittfogel might mean by “social stagnation”, it cannot have anything to do with cultural and civilizational accomplishments of this order.

Nevertheless, despite its evident achievements, China was still far remote from Modernity, and eventually only modernized “under the impact of external forces”, as Wittfogel puts it. The same conclusion holds true for all the Oriental Despotisms, except that some did so more of their own accord and others had to be compelled to do so by their colonial masters. But for a long period till well into the nineteenth century, and in some cases even much later, there was

11 Karl August Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism*, op. cit, 420.

strong resistance to any form of Modernity. This is what makes it seem as if the Oriental Despotisms were stagnating while the West was surging ahead. And, indeed, it is true that there was this kind of resistance to change throughout all the Asian regimes where the six dynasties had established themselves: the Romanovs in Russia, the Ottomans through to the Sunni Muslim Ecumene, the Safavids in Shia Persia, the Mughals in India, the Ming in China, and the Tokugawa in Japan. What was particular about this kind of rule that made it so inflexible, authoritarian and repressive?

One clue that presents itself for a possible answer is that nearly all of them were successors to Mongol khanates or had come under Mongol overlordship or influence. China, Central Asia, Persia and parts of the Middle East and territories around Crimea were directly ruled by Mongol Khans. Muscovite czarism developed in direct cooperation with Mongol suzerains. In Central Asia, after the Mongol Ilkhans, Timur or Tamerlane, to give him his English name, came to power claiming descent from Genghis Khan, and he and his successors ruled Persia and much of Northern India. The Mongols established the Yuan dynasty in China. They exerted a strong influence on the Ottomans in Turkey, the Mamelukes in Egypt and Syria, and indirectly also on the formation of the shogunate in Japan. Everywhere they went the Mongols introduced or inspired a particularly harsh form of rule which led to social stagnation and gave Oriental Despotism the negative connotations that the term carries to this day. Their successors, having learned their domineering methods, tended to be no better and were often even worse, as in China when the Ming dynasty seized power and ruled even more repressively than the Yuan.

Genghis Khan and all his successors modelled their rule on the military discipline that made their armies so successful in warfare. Condign punishment was inflicted for the least disobedience; orders were to be followed unquestionably under the watchword "I hear and obey". Mongol rulers expected the same kind of obedience from all their subjects. This is how the so-called Pax Mongolica was enforced and maintained. It brought undoubted benefits in enabling free movement, trade and the entry of foreigners. But it had a dark side to it which is perhaps not as well appreciated as the bright side which so impressed Marco Polo, as it still does many contemporary historians. For everywhere they ruled or where their influence carried, an inherent conservatism became the norm, especially in religion, no matter to which faith the Mongol elite converted.

The Mongols imposed the stamp of their rule on all future rulers of Eurasia, as David Robinson explains:

The Mongols established standards by which rulers in Eurasia would measure themselves ... Whatever other indigenous traditions for legitimacy and power, the Mongols and their legacy represented a critical source of political capital for ambitious dynasties across Eurasia. No one who aspired to power at home in the greater state of Eurasia could ignore that repository of imperial glory.¹²

He goes on to argue: "Even regions which had not been within the Mongol Empire were engaged with the Mongol legacy. The Delhi sultans, the Ottomans, the Mamelukes, and the Turkoman dynasties of Western Iran were conscious of their origins in the steppes and formulated their genealogical and political claims with an eye to Mongol traditions."¹³ Mongol practices of ruling became ubiquitous throughout this Eurasian sphere, as did military tactics and the wholesale resort to terror to overwhelm and cow a subject population. The Mongols handled people as they mustered their herds. This became a lesson that many later rulers would utilize.

In China the Yuan emperors, starting with Kublai Khan, sought to make themselves supreme rulers of everything under heaven. They initiated military expeditions to conquer all the countries around them, Japan, Vietnam and even distant Java, all of which failed. It was not any better when they were overthrown by Zhu Yuan Zhang who established the Ming dynasty, for as the Ming Taizu Emperor he was even more tyrannical than the Mongols had been. He eliminated the aristocratic families who had some hold on power and purged the bureaucracy by killing thousands of Mandarins. Eventually, as we saw, his successors shut off China from the outside world in a self-inflicted isolation also perpetuated by the Manchus who formed the next dynasty. Under this system all power was concentrated in the palace, to be exercised by the emperor himself, if he was capable and strong; but when he was weak or young it fell into the hands of the palace eunuchs who were always at odds with the administrative Mandarins. This was one of the most corrupting aspects of the Chinese Oriental despotism inherited from the Mongols.

Recently there has been a tendency among Western historians to romanticize the Mongols and the Pax Mongolica which seems to them an early intimation of Globalization. Thus, Peter Frankopan writes of the Mongols as follows:

12 David M. Robinson, ed., *Culture, Courtiers and Competition: the Ming Court* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 366.

13 Ibid, 366.

Militarily dominant, politically astute and theologically tolerant, the Mongol template for success was far remote from our common perception of them. But for all their efficiency, they were lucky in their timing ... Across the continent of Asia and Europe, Genghis Khan and his successors were not just stumbling into a world that offered rich pickings, they found themselves stepping into a golden age.¹⁴

He then goes on to outline how the Silk Road enabled by the Pax Mongolica brought extraordinary prosperity to parts of Asia and Europe. He claims that “the Mongol conquest ... served to transform the economies of Europe”,¹⁵ which is somewhat of an exaggeration given what we know of the goods carried by ship in the Mediterranean and the North Sea. The Silk Road only delivered a few precious commodities, mainly silk, in fact.

The silk that the Silk Road brought to Europe was purchased at the price of Mongol rule through much of Asia, and in the long run it was a heavy cost to bear, not to mention the Mongol yoke that the long-suffering Russian people had to bear for centuries. An even more exaggerated sense of what the Mongols meant for Europe is given by Felipe Fernandez-Armesto:

It is hard to resist the conclusion that the revolutionary expression of western civilization at the time – the technical progress, the innovation in art, the readjustment of notions of reality through the eyes of a new kind of science – were owed in part to influences exerted along the routes the Mongols created or policed.¹⁶

The time in question is 1288 when the Nestorian monk Rabban Bar Sauma, acting as an envoy of the Mongol Ilkhan of Persia, visited Rome and Paris. At that time or soon after came Giovanni Dondi dell’Orologio’s invention of clockwork; Giotto’s art appeared in Assisi; Dante would start on the *Divine Comedy*; in philosophy and science Thomas Aquinas proceeded to rediscover Aristotle and Roger Bacon worked on all kinds of scientific topics, including optics. None of these owed anything to the Mongols, with the one possible exception of Bacon’s experiments with gunpowder, which came from China but might in

14 Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 180.

15 Ibid, 185.

16 Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, *Civilization: Culture, Ambition and the Transformation of Nature* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 114.

fact have reached the West through Arab sources before the Mongols arrived on the scene.

Propaganda for the Silk Road has reached a new intensity since Xi Jinping announced the Belt and Road initiative. One wonders whether that, too, will “serve to transform the economies of Europe”, as Frankopan claims the Silk Road did. We shall see in the next chapter what purpose it is designed to serve. As for initiating any technological, artistic or scientific revolutions, as Fernandez-Armesto and other Asianists, such as Jack Goody, expect, that is surely a forlorn hope. At present it is still the case that the East has far more to learn from the West than vice-versa.

The main reason for that fact is that the West attained Modernity long before the East, which has still not fully absorbed its lessons. The West was able to advance ahead of the East because it was a civilization of free cities with access to the sea from the very start. This is not to deny that the East, too, had cities, some of them more populous, more opulent, better built and better serviced. But they were always in thrall to the ruling power, frequently with military garrisons policing their affairs. By contrast, Western cities, even if not politically independent, were nevertheless self-governing, such as the medieval communes. Those who lived in them were citizens or something equivalent; but crucially they were neither serfs nor indentured peasants. In fact, entering the city made them free, “Stadt Luft macht frei”, as the medieval motto went. Weber writes on the fundamental distinction of the Western from the Eastern city in the following terms:

In contrast to the Occident, the cities in China and throughout the Orient lacked political autonomy. The oriental city was not a “polis” in the sense of Antiquity, and knew nothing of “city law” of the Middle Ages, for it was not a “commune” with political privileges of its own. Nor was there a citizenry in the sense of a self-equipping military estate such as existed in the occident ... the fetters of the sib were never shattered. The new citizen, above all the newly rich one, retained his relations to the native place of his sib, its ancestral land and temple. Hence all ritually and personally important relations with the native village were maintained.¹⁷

Braudel follows Weber in ascribing much of Western originality to the unique nature of its cities, or towns as his translator renders it:

¹⁷ Max Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, trans. H.H. Gerth (New York: Free Press, 1951), 13.

The West was, as it were, the luxury of the world. The towns there had been brought to a standard hardly to be found anywhere. They had made Europe's greatness. But although this fact is very well known, the phenomenon is not simple.¹⁸

According to Braudel, the key to the success of the medieval cities is that they were able to free themselves from the domination of the lords, kings and emperors of the surrounding territorial states. This enabled them to establish a civilization such as had not existed elsewhere. This was the precondition for Modernity, as we have called it. What made this urban autonomy possible was that the city did not succumb to the State as had happened time and again in the past:

History is full of this slow secular up and down movement, urban expansion, birth and rebirth: Greece from the fifth to the second century BC; Rome too; Islam from the ninth century; China under the Songs. But these revivals always featured two runners, the state and the town. The state usually won and the town remained subject and under a heavy yoke. The miracle of the first great urban centuries in Europe was that the town won entirely, at least in Italy, Flanders and Germany.¹⁹

The freeing of these cities from the State, that is, from territorial powers usually based well inland, and their location by the sea, affording ready communication by ship, as was the case in Italy, Flanders and North Germany, was of enormous consequence for Western Civilization leading up to Modernity. It meant that life in these cities could not be restrained from trying out all kinds of possibilities and made to conform to a central authority, whether political, religious or any other kind requiring conformity. As Braudel puts it:

It was able to try to experiment with leading a completely separate life for quite a long time. This was a colossal event. Its genesis cannot be pinpointed with certainty, but its enormous consequences are visible.²⁰

This point about the possibility of "leading quite a separate life for a long time" is crucial in grasping why Modernity occurred in the West and not in the East.

18 Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life 1400–1800*, trans. Miriam Kochan (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1973), 396.

19 Ibid, 398.

20 Ibid, 398.

The Western city was open to the kind of experimentation that would lead to the subsequent development of the Forces of Modernity – namely, advanced capitalism, the bureaucracy of a rational-legal State, modern science and technology – whereas the Eastern city was not. The Eastern city was always in thrall to some central authority, usually that of rulers but also sometimes that of priests or monks or interpreters of religious law. The Western city could much more easily go its own way and partly or fully ignore the dictates of any central powers, secular or religious, even that of the Pope. Being excommunicated was not a sanction that a powerful city needed to fear unduly. Emperor or king could also be flouted as circumstances required it; and even going to war against either of them was for a long time a possibility. It was never possible to ban or restrain the spread of any idea or belief throughout the length and breadth of Christian Europe, even rank heresies could not be fully extirpated.

Within its protective walls the city could experiment with anything at all, with different ways of living and organizing the affairs of city life. So, it is within the cities of Italy, Flanders and Germany that we find the stirrings of modern forms of commercial and financial capitalism, despite the Church's ban on usury. As Braudel remarks, "capitalism and towns are basically the same thing in the West."²¹ He expounds this as follows:

A new state of mind was established, broadly that of an early, still faltering, Western capitalism – a collection of rules, possibilities, calculations, the art both of getting rich and living. And also gambling and risk: the key words of commercial language, *fortuna*, *ventura*, *ragione*, *prudenza*, *sicurita*, define the risks to be guarded against.²²

Trade by sea played a large part in developing such a vocabulary and the entrepreneurial mentality that goes with it; as we can easily gather from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* with its argosies, ventures, loans and forfeits; even though that play was written a few centuries later, it still reflects conditions in Venice during the Middle Ages. We could go on and list, as Weber does, what had already been achieved by then in the practice of rational accounting and calculation of profits, such as double-entry book keeping, and in sharing risks in early forms of partnership, such as *commenda* sea-loans. Joint stock companies with limited liability would come later, as would buying

²¹ Ibid, 400.

²² Ibid, 400.

insurance, stock exchanges and much else that capitalism requires to function effectively.

Much the same kind of argument can be made in respect of the modern State, science and technology where the West also had a head-start in the race to Modernity. The cities of Europe, above all those in northern Italy where Florence frequently took the lead, were already experimenting with all kinds of administrative arrangements that would lead to the establishment of the division of functions or powers within a modern State and with the establishment of offices with specific responsibilities and a professional bureaucracy. In fact, the term “state” comes from the peculiar political practice of assigning government to a Podesta – a kind of ruler and government for hire in cities where internal divisions could not be peacefully overcome, as in *Romeo and Juliet* – whose governing staff was called “lo stato”. Much else in politics, such as resident ambassadors, was also pioneered in these Italian cities.

In respect of science, it must not be forgotten that it was the cities that housed the universities, those in Italy among the earliest. It was in these, especially that of Padua, that the scientific knowledge of the Ancients was revived. The recovery of the texts of Archimedes was particularly important. After the universities, it was the academies that played a leading role, with the first such being established in Florence by the Medicis. Florence became the main centre of the Italian Renaissance which also had its correlative effects on the sciences as well as the arts, for science and art were then hardly to be distinguished; one need only think of the invention of perspective. Technology or engineering was also not to be separated, as the great artist virtuosos were also engineers, for example, Alberti, Brunelleschi, Leonardo and many others.

There was nothing like this in the East where under Oriental Despotism neither a Renaissance nor a Reformation could occur, for such revolutionary cultural changes were impossible. We have already touched on the role that the Renaissance played in the origins of Modernity; and, according to Weber, the Reformation was also of crucial importance. But the latter, as is well known, is a contentious thesis, which Braudel, among other historians, refused to accept. We shall not enter into that controversy here, but simply treat it as a hypothesis that is worth considering since it leads us into a more extensive account of the Forces of Modernity, which we go on to discuss next.

3 Western Modernity

Modernity, like the other great transitions in history, began with a Cultural Revolution, or to be more precise, with two such parallel revolutions known

as the Renaissance and the Reformation. These started in different places, the former in Italy and the latter in Germany but the effects of both were felt concurrently, either directly or indirectly throughout Europe, and in that sense, they were complementary, though fundamentally opposed in spirit. Both undertook revivals of earlier stages of Western Civilization. The Renaissance was a rebirth of the art and learning of the ancients, that is, of the previous Greco-Roman phase of Western Civilization. The Reformation was a return to the Bible, that is, to the Judaic Old Testament and the early Christian New Testament, together with the patristic writings, especially those of St Augustine written in late Roman times. But as was soon apparent, neither retreat into the past was in any sense a reactionary move backwards in time; each was rather the starting point of a daring and bold jump into the future.

The Renaissance produced glories of the arts rarely equalled before or since, whether this be in painting, sculpture, architecture, all the varieties of literature and the forms of music. In learning, science and philosophy not all that much was added to knowledge, but the writings of the ancients were rescued from oblivion and brought back into learned circulation. The occasional original mind did embark on a new departure, such as Machiavelli in history and politics or Copernicus, Vesalius and Paracelsus in science. Their work laid the foundations for the later Scientific Revolution in the seventeenth century.

The Scientific Revolution began in Italy as an outcrop of the Renaissance, but it was soon impacted by the Reformation when the main area of activity shifted north to Holland and England, as Weber's work bears out.²³ In Italy, as elsewhere in Catholic Europe, science was largely stymied by the Church and Inquisition, as the trial of Galileo had its repercussions elsewhere. Conditions were much more favourable for science in Protestant countries, especially in Holland.²⁴ There was what Weber called an elective affinity between the new science and Calvinism; even though diehard Calvinists, such as Voetius in Utrecht, were strongly opposed to Descartes and the new science and preferred to stick to Aristotle. However, a little later science and religion were reconciled, as Weber notes: "If you recall Swammerdam's statement 'Here I bring you the proof of God's providence in the anatomy of a louse', you will see what the scientific worker, influenced (indirectly) by Protestantism and Puritanism, conceived to be his task: to show the path to God."²⁵

23 Max Weber "Science as a Vocation", in *From Max Weber*, eds. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958).

24 See Wiep van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza: An Essay in the Philosophy of the Seventeenth Century Dutch Republic* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), chap. 1.

25 Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation", op. cit, 142.

Once science was established in Europe, technology, too, soon leapt ahead beyond what had been attained in any other epoch or civilization. This was already starting to be the case even prior to the Scientific Revolution because the almost incessant wars between the European powers promoted development of military technologies both for land armies and in naval warfare. The perfection of gunpowder cannons, originally a Chinese invention, was crucial in both respects. The building of manoeuvrable sailing ships led to sea-going expeditions in trade and exploration. Science was enlisted in the development of navigational technologies, which began with the compass, but went on to new methods of direction finding, location and map making. Eventually the problem of measuring longitude was solved by building very accurate clocks. Clock making was a European mechanical art which went back to the Middle Ages – Giovanni Dondi dell'Orologio of Padua perfected clock work in the mid-fourteenth century and this had no parallels elsewhere outside Europe. The importance of time keeping for science, as, for example, in the work of Galileo on mechanics, cannot be overestimated. Another crucial late medieval technology was Gutenberg's invention of printing with moveable metal type, which together with paper – another Chinese product – would transform culture in Europe. Chinese wood-block printing was not as adaptable as alphabet script to the widespread growth of book literacy. One need not follow McLuhan in his extravagant ideas of a wholesale Gutenberg Revolution to acknowledge the enormous impact that printing had on intellectual and literary culture in general. It is likely that the Reformation would not have been possible without it, and neither would the Scientific Revolution.

With the development of the new science during the Scientific Revolution and the new technologies that this in time enabled, Europe leapt ahead of the rest of the world by the seventeenth century in these respects. Nothing comparable to this did or could occur elsewhere, it was a uniquely European enterprise. Chinese, Indian and Islamic science could not come anywhere near this level of both theoretical explanation and practical application. For even though the subsequent Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century unfolded in its initial phase independently of science, through sheer empirical trials and mechanical inventions, it soon made use of science particularly in the generation of power for motion, first steam and then electric. It is no coincidence that James Watt, who partnered with Matthew Bolton in the development of the steam engine, began as a mechanical technician at Edinburgh University. The subsequent great engineers and inventors, though usually not scientifically trained in universities, also made use of scientific discoveries in developing their work. The electric motor could not have been invented but for the theory of electricity developed by Faraday and many others. This integration

of science and technology had never occurred before and not outside Europe. It is one of the key features of Modernity and explains that the word “force” in the expression Forces of Modernity must also be taken in a quite literal sense.

Science and technology were but two of what we have called the Forces of Modernity which were uniquely European or Western in a general sense. The other two were modern capitalism and the rational-legal State. Both the economic system and the political institution assumed distinctively European forms which were very different from any to be found in the Greco-Roman world of the ancients or the non-European world of the large Asian empires. What these differences amount to and when and where they originated are matters of intense scholarly disputation. These disputes go back to Marx who was the first major thinker to address these issues, and they were amplified much later by Weber who wrote on the very same topics with an apparently quite different approach, but, as we shall show, the differences between them are more superficial than real and they can be reconciled. However, what is not possible to reconcile with either of these thinkers is the current anti-Western bias of post-colonial scholars, who seek to show that there is nothing distinctive about Europe and that everything that we might consider European had already been current in China or India or Islam, and been “stolen” from the Asians, as Jack Goody claims.²⁶

In arguing that the Forces of Modernity were largely European in origin, we do not mean to imply that the other civilizations contributed nothing to this epochal development. On the contrary, as we have already sought to indicate, the Forces of Modernity owed much to non-Western sources. Islamic civilization – the closest both geographically and in kinship to the medieval European – contributed much in every respect. The Arabs and Jews as traders operating within the Mediterranean exchange system together with the Italian city-states laid the foundations of later European capitalism. The universities of Europe acquired much of their science and philosophy from manuscripts preserved by the Arabs in Spain and the Jewish translators of these ancient Greek texts. Key technologies were passed on by Muslim intermediaries from still further afield in China. This is how the three key Baconian inventions, gunpowder, the compass and paper, reached the West. The work of Joseph Needham and his school has revealed many other instances of technological debts owed to China. There is much scholarly contention regarding such influences because it is often difficult to tell whether something was borrowed from others or simply a concurrent development along similar lines, as is the

26 Jack Goody, *The Theft of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

case with the compass. Were windmills derived from Afghanistan or were they simply an application of Roman watermills? Paper money was first invented in China, but it proved unworkable and soon discontinued, so it is doubtful whether Europeans were influenced by this when they developed their own fiduciary currency and monetary instruments centuries later.

It is undeniable that in different civilizations at different times there were similar single developments to those which later occurred in Europe. Thus, Song China is often referred to as undergoing a kind of very early version of an Industrial Revolution. But such, usually brief and sporadic occurrences do not amount to what took place in Europe in a comprehensive and concerted way, so that a capitalist economy, a rational-legal State, together with a new science and technology were mutually supporting projects consciously undertaken in line with each other. This was already the case by the mid-seventeenth century in all the major countries of Europe, particularly so in Holland, England and France. In France the Absolutist State of Louis XIV and his chief minister Colbert led to the establishment of handicraft manufacturing industries, an academy of sciences which paid salaries to its members, canal building for commerce, the encouragement of mechanical inventions, and colonial ventures in settlement and trade. Analogous developments took place in Holland and England at the same time at the behest of different types of political institutions which were even more conducive to capitalism, science and technology. But, of course, the beginnings of each of these went back way before the mid-seventeenth century, as Marx, Weber and many other historians of these fields have shown.

When, where and why did modern or high capitalism begin in Europe? Marx and Weber provide different answers, with Marx stressing the purely economic aspects and Weber also emphasizing the cultural ones. According to Marx, it began with the discovery of America and the huge stimulus to finance this brought about through the importation into Spain of huge amounts of bullion that came yearly with the Indies fleet to Cadiz. Most of this money eventually ended up in Genoa and Antwerp, used to pay for the Spanish tercios recruited to fight the Northern Protestants. Thus, not only trade but also wars were stimulated and this led to the expansion of the powers of the monarchical states. A similar effect occurred in the Protestant states through the abolition of monasteries and the sequestration of Church lands, as occurred in England under Henry VIII. Later, under Elizabeth, this appropriation of land was continued through the enclosure movement.

In Weber's view, however, neither of these developments amount to modern capitalism proper, though they were undoubtedly preparations for it. These were merely forms of booty capitalism which Weber calls political capitalism

and traces back to the ancients in the extremely well-developed taxation regime that the late Roman republic developed in the conquered territories and then even better regulated during the empire. But according to Weber, this was not a rational profit-seeking form of capitalism, which only arrived due to the influence of Protestantism.²⁷

Weber's Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism thesis is easy to misunderstand if one does not have clearly in mind what Weber means by capitalism in this context, that is, what kind of capitalism he is referring to. It is apparent that Braudel has failed to grasp this point from an incidental remark he makes about capitalism in ancient Carthage:

In Carthage, an intense economic life, which a historian would not hesitate to describe as 'capitalist', was not incompatible with a backward-looking religious mentality. What would Max Weber have thought?²⁸

Weber would have thought that Braudel had not understood to what kind of "capitalism" the thesis about the "spirit of capitalism" was intended to apply. It was modern capitalism, and not any that could have been found in the ancient world, neither in Carthage nor later in Rome, though that was already extremely well developed, as we mentioned previously by reference to Weber's work on ancient capitalism.²⁹ It was specifically modern capitalism that required the kind of methodical application to work as a calling provided by Calvinism at the point of its origin. Carthagian capitalism was obviously quite compatible with Moloch worship, a rather backward religious mentality, indeed, but perhaps no more so than that of the Romans.

What then is the mentality of modern capitalism that was obviously absent in Carthage or Rome or in China or Islam, despite the intensity of economic activity that was already present? Trade and the massing of wealth had been practiced from time immemorial in many societies all over the world, but that does not make for capitalism as we now know it, though this is a common confusion among historians, to which even Braudel is prone. What makes for modern capitalism is a rational calculating mentality directed towards profit. In his thorough and detailed study of Weber's theory of modern capitalism, John Love sets out the following formal conditions for the kind of rational economic action that this system requires:

²⁷ See John Love, *Antiquity and Capitalism: Weber and the Sociological Foundations of Roman Civilization* (London: Routledge, 1991).

²⁸ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean in the Ancient World*, op. cit, 228.

²⁹ See John Love, *Antiquity and Capitalism*, op. cit.

- (a) the systematic allocation between present and future utilities, the control of which the actor feels he can count on, that is “saving”;
- (b) the systematic allocation of utilities for various potential uses in the order of their relative urgency and ranked according to the principle of marginal utility, that is “consumption”;
- (c) the systematic procurement through the production or transportation of such utilities for which all the necessary means of production are controlled by the actor himself, taking into account the irksomeness of the requisite labour services as well as other potential uses to which the requisite goods could be put, that is, “production”; and
- (d) the systematic acquisition by agreement with the present possessors, or with competing bidders, of assured power of control and disposal over utilities, that is, “appropriation”.³⁰

These formal conditions of rational economic action can only be satisfied when a number of sociological systems are in place: a monetary exchange economy, capital accounting through double-entry bookkeeping, private property safeguarded by legal guarantees, an open market for all commodities including land and labour, laws governing joint stock companies and other enterprises, and many more which are perhaps not strictly essential but are almost invariably present, such as labour saving machinery and the kind of technology that makes possible advanced products and forms of production.

Such a form of capitalism was not possible outside of Europe, and only became so during the period of Modernity. There were anticipations of specific single features of modern capitalism in earlier times, but not all of them at once and cohering in the one systematic complex. In ancient Rome producers of staple commodities came close to mass production for an open market. Islamic merchants carried on extensive international trade and had already developed many of the financial instruments to do so, such as bills of exchange, promissory notes, joint partnerships and insurance, as revealed by the documents of Jewish traders in early medieval Egypt.³¹ In Song China potters had perfected the mass production of china, that is, porcelain wares, deploying highly developed and refined techniques that Europe could not match till the eighteenth century. Bankers in medieval Italy had already developed all manner of loans, and this took on an international scale with the Fuggers in Germany. But none of these yet amounted to modern capitalism, which only

30 John Love, *Weber, Schumpeter and Modern Capitalism: Towards a General Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 80.

31 See David Arbesman, *The Boundless Sea: A Human History of the Oceans* (New York: Penguin, 2020), 175–6.

came into being when all such factors came together in one integrated and systematic whole, and this only happened during the period of Modernity.

The real foundations of modern capitalism must be located in Holland in the seventeenth century and in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with Holland taking the lead in the first period down to the French invasion of 1672, and from then on England surging ahead, especially after the union with Scotland. All of these were Protestant countries with strong Calvinist or Puritan influences. This factor constitutes the key to Weber's account of the further development of high capitalism beyond trade and into production. This took place in the eighteenth century predominantly in England, and would later on be called by historians the Industrial Revolution, a crucial feature of which was the development of the factory system of production, which eventually required machines to augment labour. According to Weber, the fact that non-conformist Protestant sectarians were heavily involved in setting up this new mode of production points to the validity of his thesis that their so-called "spirit of capitalism" had been originally derived from the Protestant ethic or more specifically from Calvinist varieties of it. Once again, we see that culture, in this case in the form of religion, is crucial to economic development. This was also the case in the Americas where the economic development of Protestant North America contrasts sharply to that of Catholic South America.

The development of capitalism in the modern period, which we have charted from the discovery of America to the supremacy of the United States of America, went hand and hand with the rise and growth of the modern State, the earliest of our Forces of Modernity. The date 1492 was coincidentally significant in both respects for in that year Columbus set out on his voyage of discovery, financed by Ferdinand and Isabella, joint rulers of a united monarchy of Spain, and at the same time the Spanish forces finally took Grenada, the last Moorish outpost in the Christian peninsula. Spain became the model for a new form of State, that of an Absolutist Monarchy, and it was soon joined by France under Francis I and England under Henry VIII, with other monarchs following all over Europe.

Both Marx and Weber provide very similar accounts as to how this kind of State arose historically, superseding the welter of overlapping and concurrent authority forms current in medieval Europe. As Marx puts it:

The seignorial privileges of the landowners and towns became transformed into so many attributes of state power, the feudal dignitaries into paid officials and the motley pattern of conflicted plenary powers into

the regulated plan of a state authority whose work is divided and centralized as in a factory.³²

To explain the emergence of the modern state out of the medieval “motley pattern of conflicting plenary powers” Marx utilizes two economic notions that he had already developed to account for the rise of capitalism: expropriation of ownership and division of labour within a centralized organization. He applies these to politics and comes up with the idea of an expropriation of powers by a central power holder, namely an Absolutist monarch in the first place, and the division of powers or functions within a centralized State authority. Thus, Marx sees the development of Capitalism and the modern State as parallel processes proceeding along similar lines of expropriation and subdivision.

Weber takes up Marx’s idea of expropriation of power and division of powers within a centralized organization to account for the State:

Sociologically speaking, the modern state is an “enterprise” (Betrieb) just like a factory ... the “separation” of the workers from the material means of production, destruction, academic research, and finance in general is the common basis of the modern state, in its political, cultural and military sphere, and of the private capitalist economy.³³

The words are almost the same as in Marx, with the factory model featuring in both. However, Weber seems to have a better historical sense of what this political expropriation involves, as he puts it:

Everywhere the development of the modern state is initiated through the action of the Prince. He paves the way for the expropriation of the autonomous and “private” bearers of executive power who stand beside him, of those who in their own right possess the means of administration, warfare, and financial management, as well as politically usable goods of all sorts. The whole process is a complete parallel to the development of the capitalist enterprise formed through the gradual expropriation of the independent producers. In the end the modern state controls the means

32 Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, trans. Anonymous (New York: International Publishers, 1987), 104.

33 Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, eds. Roth, G., and C. Wittich (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1978), 1394.

of political organization, which actually come together under the single head.³⁴

Weber uses the term “Prince” in Machiavelli’s sense to mean the head of state, whoever he happens to be. In the first place this was the Absolutist monarch, such as the Renaissance kings and queens to whom we previously referred. These were the territorial sovereigns who were the founders of the states known as Spain, England and France. The culmination of this process of Absolutist monarchy took place in France when Louis XIV declared “l’État c’est moi”. The transition from Absolutist monarch to Republic in France took place in the course of the French Revolution when sovereignty ceased to be vested in a single person but in the people or Nation as a whole. Thus, was born the nation-state which is still the dominant form of the State at present.

The foundation of the modern State during the Renaissance-Reformation period was finally confirmed by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, and a new era in European politics dawned which was quite other than any previously current or any outside Europe. The State became an autonomous political organization that outstripped in size and resources any other institution in society. Its military power grew ever larger as did its capacities to exact taxation necessary to pay for this, as well as all its other expenditures in areas of social life where no previous State had ever intruded. It was a mutually sustaining circle: as armies grew bigger this made possible ever greater exactions from previously independent political entities, above all cities; and as more could be taxed to a higher extent, this made for larger, better disciplined and equipped armies; and so the process went on. This is a subject to which Norbert Elias devotes much attention for it explains how in sheer material and power measures, namely, in the capacity to monopolize violence and to use it for taxation, the European State far outpaced any other.³⁵ And this is, indeed, a key aspect of its difference from any other, as Thomas Piketty also shows.³⁶ Weber’s definition of the modern state reflects closely these features:

The modern state is a compulsory organization which organizes domination. It has been successful in seeking to monopolize the legitimate use

34 Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation”, in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. and trans. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 82.

35 Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process, Vol 11: Power and Civility*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).

36 Thomas Piketty, *Capital and Ideology*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2020), 365.

of physical force as a means of domination within a territory. To this end the state has combined the material means of organization in the hands of its leaders, and it has expropriated all autonomous functionaries of estates who formerly controlled these means in their own right. The State has taken their position and now stands in top place.³⁷

Following on from the classic work of Marx, Weber and Elias, Piketty in a very recent work also devotes much attention to this aspect of modern State formation, but unfortunately, he never refers to any of his illustrious predecessors. Piketty's main interest is to explain how it was possible even for small European states such as Portugal and Holland to establish such large colonial empires and how European states in general could command fiscal and military resources large enough to outpace and defeat even the largest empires in Asia. He shows how European states were able to increase their tax revenues during the key period of Modernity, whereas Oriental states could not manage to do so:

To summarize: the development of the modern state involved two great leaps forward. The first unfolded between 1500 and 1800 in the leading states of Europe, which were able to increase their tax revenues from barely 1–2 percent of national income to about 6–8 percent. This process was accompanied by the development of ownership societies at home and colonial empires abroad. The second leap forward came in the period 1920–1980, when the rich countries as a group went from tax revenue of 3–8 percent of national income on the eve of World War I to revenues of 30–50 percent of national income in the 1980s.³⁸

At the same time fiscal capacities “stagnated at 1–2 percent of national income in the Chinese and Ottoman empires.”³⁹ Translated into military power, this meant that small European states could field much larger armies than even the largest Oriental empires:

In 1550, the Ottoman infantry and navy comprised roughly 140,000 men, equal to the French and English combined (respectively, 80,000 and 70,000 men). This equilibrium would be disrupted over the next two centuries, which were marked by endless wars in Europe. By 1780, Ottoman

37 Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation”, op. cit, 83.

38 Thomas Piketty, *Capital and Ideology*, op. cit., 369.

39 Ibid, 366.

forces remained virtually unchanged (150,000 men) while French and English armies and navies now numbered 450,000 (280,000 soldiers and sailors for France, 170,000 for England), in warships and firepower they also enjoyed marked superiority over potential enemies. To these numbers one must add 250,000 men from Austria and 180,000 from Prussia (states that had no military to speak of in 1550).⁴⁰

European superiority over all others in the world began around 1550 and was already decisive around a century later, not only in military matters, but in all other respects as well. In the military sphere, it was not just a matter of numbers, but of weapons, logistics and above all discipline and tactics, which is what the incessant wars in Europe produced. No army and certainly no navy could stand against a single European one by the middle of the eighteenth century. As we have already argued, in respect of the other Forces of Modernity Europe also surged ahead from around 1550 onwards. This is something that Piketty seems to overlook when he refers to purely econometric measures, such as those Kenneth Pomeranz and other Asianists employ to argue that “the more advanced parts of China and Japan had attained a level of development in the period 1750–1800 more or less comparable to corresponding regions of Western Europe.”⁴¹ If by corresponding regions is meant the Midlands of England, then in the throes of the Industrial Revolution, then this is clearly false. In many specialized industries Holland, France and parts of Germany were also ahead of either China or Japan. None of these developments depended on the importation of raw materials from the Americas, such as cotton or sugar, or from Asia, such as “textiles, silk, tea, porcelain, and so on.”⁴² Nor did they rely on inventions “stolen from China”, as Jack Goody maintains. Piketty has, unfortunately, fallen in with the anti-Western bias that so many post-colonial scholars in Western universities evince.

It is another matter to determine what this undoubted superiority of Europe over Asia, in respect of the Forces of Modernity, is due to, for this involves historical interpretation about which there can be justifiable disagreement. For no one type of explanation can be treated as inherently superior to all others. In this respect one must be very careful to specify that it is only the Forces of Modernity that are at issue and no other matters, such as religious, ethical, artistic, institutional, social or anything else to do with culture or society. Hence no claims can be made to any European superiority in these latter respects or on

40 Ibid, 371.

41 Ibid, 372.

42 Ibid, 373.

the basis of any universal standard of Progress; the Europeans were not more civilized in any evaluative sense. Nothing of this kind gave Europeans the right to embark on any mission to “convert the natives” or to any *mission civilizatrice*. The destruction of non-Western cultural values and ways of life in pursuit of such self-serving slogans was, indeed, the cultural “crime” of colonialism that is deservedly castigated. However, it must not be overlooked that the capacity of Europeans to commit such misdeeds was made possible by their evident and indisputable superiority in terms of the Forces of Modernity.

4 The Collapse of Europe

In this context we cannot even begin to properly discuss the contentious issue of what gave the Europeans their head start in developing the Forces of Modernity ahead of all others, and thereby initiating the civilizational stage of Modernity that all others have since been forced to follow. We can certainly point to the advantage that became evident during the Renaissance, when the West emerged as the successor of ancient Greco-Roman civilization. Having Aristotle, Euclid, Galen and Ptolemy as precursors gave Western science enormous leverage. Though the Muslims had briefly taken over this ancient scientific heritage, they were unfortunately unable to build on it due to religious obscurantism and conquests by predatory tribal peoples from Central Asia. They could not delve deeper into ancient sources. The West, by contrast, had already made a huge leap forward in education during the so-called twelfth century proto-Renaissance, which led to scholasticism and the foundation of the universities with their theology, law and medical faculties. The Muslim *madrasahs* were no match for Europe’s medieval universities.

The law schools worked in direct continuity with Roman law, both in canon and civil law. The latter was particularly important in respect of contract law which was so crucial for the commercial dealings of the newly burgeoning cities after the hiatus of the Dark Ages. As we have already studied, the administration of cities as semi-autonomous or later completely independent entities in some parts of Europe, notably in Northern Italy, Flanders and Germany, was a direct legacy of the Greek polis and the Roman notion of citizenship. As Weber has shown, there was no such city autonomy outside the West.⁴³ A large part of modern politics, including its vocabulary of forms of government and

43 Max Weber, *The City*, trans. Don Martindale and Gertrud Neuwirth (New York: The Free Press, 1958).

the political theories associated with these, came directly from the Greeks, together with Roman adjustments.

The constant struggle in Europe between ecclesiastical authority and secular powers ensured that Europe would never unite into the one homogeneous empire, as invariably happened elsewhere. Europe always remained a contentious sphere of warring dynasties, cities and states, almost never at peace; eventually the various churches also entered into this competitive conflict after the Reformation. This had decided advantages in all fields of development. It obviously stimulated military and technological progress. It created economic competition and a drive for trade that eventually led Europeans overseas beyond their continent. It made it almost impossible for censorship to be enforced and for a complete uniformity in belief and ideas to prevail throughout the whole of Europe, which provided enormous stimulus for heterodox views to flourish and in the long run for intellectual innovation to proceed unimpeded, though sporadically repressed at certain times and places.

These are merely some of the many factors to be considered in assessing what was different about Europe and what enabled it to rise ahead of all others in respect of the Forces of Modernity. At the start of the second millennium around the year 1000, Europe was what its detractors now claim it to be, the backward promontory of Asia; but at that time it was far behind the Islamic caliphates of Cordova or Baghdad, or the Byzantine Empire in Constantinople, or the Song Empire in China. However, by 1500 Europe was already starting to surge ahead of all the others.

Undoubtedly around 1500 the Europeans were the first initiators of the civilizational phase we have called Modernity. It is important to emphasize, however, that had the Europeans not initiated Modernity, it would inevitably have happened elsewhere, though at a much later date. But the Europeans developed first and this is to their historical credit, regardless of how this phase of Modernity, which has now become global and transformed itself into the present post-civilization, will eventually turn out. One might speculate that if the modernizing process had been undertaken by the East Asians, it would have avoided the mistakes of the Westerners and brought about a better outcome than the one we must now confront. Would the Chinese with their Daoist regard for Nature have avoided incurring the ecological damage which we must now seek to repair? Would they have been more tolerant and understanding in dealing with other religions and cultures? We will never know.

The supremacy of Europe over the rest of the world was a slow long-term process that extended over centuries. But by the start of the nineteenth century, at the very latest, it was complete. All that remained for the European powers to do was to assert their superiority in acts of conquest that we now call

colonialism. This had already begun during the eighteenth century with the British inroads into India made by the future Duke of Wellington at about the same time as Bonaparte's attack on the Ottoman Empire in Egypt, which failed, but would inevitably be resumed later. Once the Napoleonic wars were over and Europe turned away from internal struggles, it moved outwards against most of the regions of the world that still remained outside its sway.

The incentive to do so was provided by the very success of the Forces of Modernity throughout the nineteenth century. Britain was usually in the lead, but the other powers followed suit closely behind, with France and the states of Germany rapidly industrializing and developing educational and research facilities for science and technology. Once Germany and Italy were united and consolidated into nation-states, under the instigation of the new ideology of nationalism, most of Europe took on this political form – apart from the three surviving empires of Austria, Russia and the Ottomans which followed an older style multiethnic monarchical rule. In the twentieth century the instability of the three empires in the face of the nationalist demands of their constituent ethnic groups would eventually lead to the first major disaster to shake European civilization – the First World War.

This disaster ensued directly from the fact that Europe had developed the Forces of Modernity far beyond anything to be encountered outside it. This became increasingly apparent throughout the nineteenth century: industrial capitalism grew to an ever-greater extent; the State extended its bureaucratic reach to ever more areas of civil society, such as education, health and what were previously charitable activities; scientific research assumed an organized form through the instigation of the State; and technological invention benefited from all these developments and began the process of the technification of all human activities. But at the same time, due to these developments the militarization of society proceeded apace to an ever greater extent. Universal conscription of the male population had already been practiced by most of the major states, except Britain, since the Napoleonic wars. Armies consequently became larger and even better equipped as military technology rapidly and continuously advanced, leading to the first arms-races in history. War became ever more certain as nationalism provided the motive for international confrontations. It was only a matter of time before a general European war would break out and drag in much of the rest of the world that was already linked to it. It so happened that this took place in 1914.

It is also true that Progress, as then understood, embraced much more than the Forces of Modernity; it also included the ideals of the Enlightenment as promulgated by the eighteenth-century *philosophes* and as realized politically by the French Revolution in its declaration of the principles of liberty, equality

and fraternity. As a result, humanitarian Progress gradually spread throughout Europe, as individual rights – including voting rights leading to some measure of democracy – were extended in all the states of Europe, albeit against strong conservative, aristocratic and clerical reactionary opposition. This was beginning to happen by the end of the nineteenth century, even in the three backward empires and there is no reason to assume that it would eventually not have been extended also to the European colonial possessions. Progress in this sense seemed unstoppable, or at least it seemed so to progressive and liberal minded thinkers.

Even to revolutionary minded thinkers it seemed that revolution was no longer necessary to ensure the march of Progress. In most of the developed states the champions of the workers, whether these were moderate Socialists, as in Britain, or Marxists, as on the Continent, had given up all thought of violent uprising. They assumed that their demands would be met through the ballot box; not an unreasonable assumption, seeing that their political representation was continually rising in all the parliaments; in Germany the Marxist Social Democratic party was the largest in the Reichstag. Only in the backward and less developed regions of southern Europe were the Anarchists still active with their violent propaganda of the Deed, but they were being displaced even there by the Socialists. Only in Russia was there a small splinter group of revolutionary Marxist called the Bolsheviks under a leader in exile, Lenin; but to most knowledgeable observers that faction seemed equally destined to come to nothing. Little did they suspect what the First World War would do for the Bolsheviks.

This rosy picture of Progress entertained almost universally on the eve of the First World War was shattered completely by that war itself. By the conclusion of the war, things looked very different. Lenin and his Bolsheviks had come to power in Russia and would begin to institute a new kind of regime that we now know as totalitarianism. Almost simultaneously in Italy, a renegade socialist called Mussolini would found a new kind of ideology calling itself Fascism and a political party of war veterans who marched on Rome and easily seized power from the liberal government, aided and abetted by the Monarchy, Church and Army who viewed them as saviours from Bolshevism. At the same time in Germany a similar movement of National Socialists, under an ex-corporal and aspiring painter called Hitler, would attempt a *putsch* in Munich but fail. But Hitler and the Nazis came to power ten years later nevertheless by democratic means through the ballot-box, after the German people had been suitably demoralized by the continuing effects of the war, compounded by the economic miseries of the Great Depression. With totalitarian regimes installed in Germany, Italy and Russia, a new drift to war became inexorable.

The outcome was the Second World War, one of the most ruthless and savage ever fought. Its destructive effects on European civilization were irremediable, even though the material damage was soon repaired.

Despite the devastation of the war, in the post-war period Western Europe, aided by America, entered into an unparalleled period of prosperity, a veritable age of *dolce vita*. Eastern Europe in the Communist bloc lagged behind, but it, too, recovered from the worst war damage and prospered to a lesser degree. At least in Western Europe it seemed that the main promises of Progress had come near to being fulfilled; and certainly, judging by purely economic measures, this is indeed the case. The standard of living for people in all classes rose steadily to previously unimaginable levels. And at the same time the disparities in wealth and other measures of inequality were narrowing, and this put an end to class war in favour of cooperative conciliation. Piketty provides evidence for this progress, by comparing the distribution of ownership and income before the First World War and after the Second World War.⁴⁴ All the tables and graphs he provides show unequivocally that equality was growing, at least until the mid-1970s, when an economic downturn began and stagflation set in. From then on, the trend has been reversed and, according to Piketty, inequality levels are now back to where they were before the First World War, even more so in America than in Europe.

We must now ask what this Progress up to the 1970s meant. Thanks to the various “economic miracles” and the expanding democratizing process, Europe did finally attain the same standard of living as America. But is this to be identified with civilization? It is obvious that both in America and in Europe this enormous advance in Progress was largely due to the ever-continuing expansion of the Forces of Modernity. This means that even when economic downturns occur, the Capitalist economy keeps growing, the State assumes ever newer functions in respect of welfare, technology provides ever newer inventions to make previously unimaginable things possible, and science generates the knowledge and educational opportunities for ever greater numbers to participate in – so it is obvious that in all these respects Progress will ipso facto continue. But the key question remains: is Progress in this sense tantamount to civilization?

As we have already explained, civilization is a matter of culture in the first place before it is also anything else. It is a matter of the quality of life and not of the standard of living. It is based on the character of people, on their ethical

44 Thomas Piketty, *Capital and Ideology*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

standing rather than on mere law and order within a society. It promotes literacy among people in the sense of a book culture that goes beyond the mere capacity to read texts. It is indifferent to the gadgets people utilize in their daily lives or the machines they deploy in their work. Hence mere technical competence or even scientific knowledge of the pragmatic kind is not necessarily conducive to civilization. The technician or professional expert need not be a cultured person, and under present conditions of education most frequently isn't one.

Hence Progress in so far as it promotes the Forces of Modernity alone need not be conducive to civilization. In fact, it can be antithetical to civilization in so far as the alternatives previously outlined run counter to each other; that is, when the standard of living debases the quality of life, when law and order makes ethics redundant, when universal literacy militates against real book literacy, when gadgetry deprives people of skills and machinery replaces the arts, and when expertise and scientism inhibits the cultivation of real knowledge and understanding. These counter-productive workings of Progress are all too evident when so-called "progressive" tendencies react against the culture of civilization in a most paradoxical manner. We can call this the paradox of Progress and explaining it will be our primary task in this and the subsequent chapters.

This paradox of Progress obviously emanates from the hypertrophic development of the Forces of Modernity. When capitalism, the State, science and technology reach the dominant stage that they have now attained, then this leads to all kinds of paradoxical consequences for our culture and thereby also for the state of our civilization. None of these negative repercussions of Progress were generally apparent before the First World War. The progressivists of whatever political colouring, usually liberals and socialists, were blind to them then and many have remained so ever since. Only a few extraordinary individuals, generally of a conservative and pessimistic disposition, were first aware that the march of Progress was not proceeding to its intended utopian destination. Kierkegaard was among the very first, and he was followed by literary figures such as Baudelaire and Dostoyevsky, then came thinkers such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and later Weber. After the First World War the signs were all too evident that all was not well with civilization, and it was German thinkers such as Freud and Spengler who brought this to the attention of the literate public. They were generally denounced by European progressivists and Marxists as cultural pessimists, and by Americans as European decadents. Such thinkers could be ignored as long as things went well in Europe, but not after the disasters of the two wars, for then it became evident that there was some point to their jeremiads.

The wars certainly speeded up the processes that were already in train by the latter part of the nineteenth century. Thus, it might be argued that from a long-term historical perspective the erosion of civilization was inevitable because of the previously mentioned paradox of Progress. Progress as dominated and determined by the vast expansion of the Forces of Modernity was bound to react against and dissolve the cultural ethos of civilization. The bureaucratic State, industrial capitalism or socialism, science and technology were bound to have a catalytic effect on the complex cultural forms of civilization and reduce them to their elementary constituents. They were in themselves destructive of civilization.

However, no deterministic thesis can be maintained in history without caveats and qualification. It is not possible to hypothetically predict what might have happened if there had not been two such devastating World Wars, especially the latter one, which was so utterly ruinous. However, a partial test of the hypothesis that an outcome destructive of civilization was bound to arise is provided by America. America did not experience the virulence of either war; though it suffered human losses, as a society it remained untouched and inviolable. In fact, it gained considerable benefit from the wars in Europe, precisely because they enabled it to progress in respect of the Forces of Modernity. In economy, politics, science and technology America came to dominate the world after the Second World War. But what effect did this have on civilization in America? This is what we shall seek to establish next.

5 Civilization in America

America suffered very little from the two world wars, unlike Europe and most of the rest of the world. America was not troubled by revolutions or civil wars in the twentieth century and remained internally at peace. Apart from a brief period after the Great Depression, Americans attained extraordinary levels of prosperity, partly thanks to the productive capacities unleashed by technology. In every possible way America grew and its standard of living rose to unparalleled heights never before attained by common people, and only approximated to by aristocratic and bourgeois elites. Yet, paradoxically, the effect of this on culture and civilization was in many ways the opposite of that which might have been expected from previous history, where these elites developed and carried the culture of civilization. Paradoxically, in America just the opposite ensued for what followed this unparalleled prosperity was an extraordinary degree of cultural debasement and civilizational destruction. That there

was such a perverse outcome is perhaps the most outlandish of the paradoxes of Progress.

This is still going on at present as America reaches ever higher economic achievements and its GDP continues to grow, not to speak of the value of its share markets. America remains the leading economic power in the world, its transnational global companies are the household brand names operating throughout the world. They are bolstered by the huge technological advantage that America possesses in generating new types of industries, such as most recently in the information technologies, which its inventors produced and its entrepreneurs put to commercial use. The basis for such inventions is the scientific knowledge provided by a huge task force of scientists and engineers working both in universities and company laboratories and drawing their staff from the best minds in the world. Its universities are by far the leading ones, having excelled those of Europe with the possible exception of a few in England. Backing up this whole capitalist enterprise is the military-industrial complex that the State has financed and maintained since the start of the Cold War. The State itself has grown to vast proportions during this time and now employs a considerable proportion of the working population in America.

America has thus developed the most advanced version of a highly integrated complex of all the four Forces of Modernity working in tandem to constitute a total social system, the likes of which has never before been known or even envisaged in history. This is undeniably Progress at its most accelerated and it is the culmination of collective endeavour in so many vital fields. It has provided Americans with a standard of living that exceeds any other and is perhaps fifty times greater than any in the past. Though there are some severely disadvantaged groups and inequalities remain, American society is richer overall than any other and Americans in general are also freer than ever before. Individual rights and liberties are more securely held and defended than perhaps in any other society. Where else would gun ownership be so zealously maintained?

But the great historic irony is that it was precisely when America emerged from its victory in the Second World War as in every respect the dominant power in the world that the paradox of Progress came into play. For as the standard of living rose ever higher, the quality of life began to decline. Materially Americans advanced to ever greater levels of affluence, but culturally they began to suffer a marked decline. An inverse relation between material and cultural development came into effect that is at the heart of the paradox of Progress.

This began to be apparent in the 1950s as America prospered greatly and the penuries of the Great Depression became a fading memory. It was then

that huge increases in consumption were promoted and at the same time a new consumer culture came into effect. People were urged to consume beyond any conceivable necessity by a vast advertising industry that served the interests of capitalist manufacturing in absorbing the vast productive capacities of industry created by the war. People en masse were encouraged to spend and keep on spending, and to work harder so that they could spend even more. As a result, they came to view and value themselves in terms of their spending power, namely, in respect of conspicuous consumption. Whereas prior to the two World Wars it was the rich who indulged in conspicuous consumption, as Veblen has so memorably described; after these wars almost everybody who had money to spare spent it, and as they did so more wealth was created. The negative effect was barely noticed. People competed with each other for social status by outspending each other. They came to envy what their neighbours had and strove to outdo them. Thus, consumerism became rampant and has remained so ever since.

Much of this was aggravated by the arrival of the new medium of television that came to play such a prominent role in every household. Television was a marvel of technology, but it had drastic cultural consequences. It was a godsend to the advertising hucksters for they could now enter peoples' living rooms and bedrooms without having to be invited. By these means they also entered into peoples' lives and even into their dreams. The advertisers' power to control peoples' desires and aspirations grew accordingly, and was used to make them consume all the more.

This also had negative cultural consequences, for as people became addicted to television, spending countless hours on the so-called idiot box, they lost interest in other entertainments that used to be accompanied by some form of cultural engagement in which they themselves were participants, whether this be singing, embroidering or gardening. They became cultural consumers of images conveying glittering shows or serials called "soaps" or quiz contests or other mindless fare. They lost the habit of going to the movies which at least sometimes provided something more culturally engaging and worthwhile. It got to the point where even Hollywood nearly went under and could only save itself by providing box-office spectacles to appeal mainly to the young, who from then on would constitute the majority of the cinema-going public, and who became the *arbiter elegantiarum* in films and all the other popular arts, especially music. The popular arts are now oriented mainly to the tastes of a youthful public for they are the main consumers of such commodities. In popular music, only two styles are available, either rock or rap, with the occasional retro revival of earlier favourites. In films, there are fantasy spectacles full of computer-generated special effects, whose plots and characters, whether set in

a fantasy future or a past equally fantastic as far as the viewers are concerned, amount to little more than fairy tales. Once again, we encounter a basically childish mentality that no amount of schooling can penetrate, for it is the peer group, rather than the schools or universities, that determine what young people will like and what fashions they will follow. And they tend to retain these tastes later, regardless of age.

When it comes to the more serious creative arts, another kind of marketing takes over. In painting and the fine arts in general, success is determined by speculative activity on the part of the rich. They invest in artists whose stocks they believe will rise on the art market. The actual paintings themselves hardly matter, they can amount to anything or nothing. Which artists will come out on top? This is determined by the art dealers who stage exhibitions, by the directors of museums at whose discretion works are shown and bought, by compliant or extravagant critics writing for the press, and most of all by attention and publicity in the press and the media in general. Outrageous behaviour can generally secure the latter. Sometimes advertising agencies serve the same purpose, as in London where the advertising firm Saatchi and Saatchi established the Turner Prize in order to be able to create artists of their own choosing and secure for them the necessary publicity to make their works fetch high prices. There are similar art-market schemes in New York and elsewhere.

Art has entered the sphere of fashion. It no longer conveys the highest values and deepest truths of a civilization. This was the role of art in the past, in the West, as much as in China and the other high civilizations. In the West a continuous Classical tradition was current throughout the long historical span from the Greeks till our time. It is only now that the role and entire character of art has changed. Like all fashions, art has been absorbed into the marketplace as part of the aesthetic economy of capitalist consumer commodities. The artist has become a stylist or designer for the huge range of goods that the market affords, or a performer and entertainer for a paying audience, charging a fee for services rendered.

Even higher levels of cultural debasement and intellectual stultification were reached when the Information Technologies of computers and the internet were developed in the subsequent decades towards the end of the twentieth century. Once again it was the young who were in the lead, both as producers and consumers. Young people devised and marketed the new devices and turned them into information providing resources, geared to individual tastes and social media such as Facebook and many others. Through these means they were able to exercise an even greater controlling influence on the lives of the young and all others who unthinkingly succumbed to these new media rather than the now old media of television and radio. The manipulative powers of

the new were much greater for they were deliberately designed to be addictive. Starting in America, but rapidly spreading throughout the world, masses of people, now running into the billions, were all too ready to put themselves and their lives in most intimate detail into the hands of the media proprietors, who turned them into data to be disposed of as they saw fit.

The butcher's bill of this slaughter of the innocents is only now coming to account, to be paid for by the whole of society. The social media in particular are so technologically disposed, organized and managed as to give the worst aspects of human nature completely free rein, and thereby to provide the most loathsome impulses free expression in the complete safety of anonymity, without fear of the consequences of punishment or retaliation. The social media have become the perfect conduits for lies, deceit, deception and impersonation. On the public level they can act as rumour mills to sow panic or propaganda falsehoods. On an individual level they can be used to abuse and intimidate people and drive weaker minds to suicide. All ethical teachings about regard for others, about calumny and not bearing false witness have been rendered null and void on the internet. And even when there is no malice aforethought, these media are still predisposed to deprive their users of any realistic sense of factual truth by trapping them in a bubble where their own prejudices are constantly echoed back to them. The media imprison them in a Platonic cave of illusions where the essential touchstones of truth and reality are weakened and eventually lost. This has been referred to as the "death of truth".

These are but some of the many ways in which the media subvert civilization. It is an instance of one of the most perverse of the paradoxes of Progress when this kind of technological development threatens literacy. So-called computer literacy among the young tends to be in direct conflict with real cultural literacy, for the more they are engrossed with technology, with mastering the machines, the less they can give themselves to books. Literacy is a matter of books and how they are read, with what degree of attention, understanding and insight. The skimming of texts on the internet is the opposite of such "deep" reading and tends to incapacitate readers from any understanding in depth, as many authors have remarked.⁴⁵ Reading and the whole culture of the book is one of the essential aspects of all the higher civilizations, all of which feature a canon of books which every cultured individual is presumed to know.

45 See Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: How the Internet is Changing the Way We Think, Read and Remember* (London: Atlantic Books, 2010).

It is in respect of literacy in this sense that a kind of “negative dialectic of enlightenment” has ensued in the education of the young. For the more years of schooling to which they are subjected, the more their literacy in general declines. America is once again in the forefront in exemplifying this perverse outcome. In America a large proportion of youth complete their secondary education and go on to colleges, universities and other tertiary institutions to acquire degrees and diplomas. Of these, a large number go on to post-graduate studies and some attain PhDs. And yet, despite all these years of schooling and formal attainment as determined by examinations, their level of cultural sophistication as judged by more informal criteria is remarkably low and declining all the time.

Few of these graduates, even those from the very best universities, any longer read serious books, apart from the ones they are required to read for their courses, and even then, they only study extracts not complete works, contained in collections called Readers specially tailored to their limited interests and needs. They certainly do not buy books as students used to do half a century ago. The figures for sales of serious books, for example those published by the academic presses or the few commercial ones that still have such lists, have gone down per individual title on average to less than a tenth of what they were then.

As far as the books that constitute current literature are concerned, best-seller marketing strategies rule all literary production. Such books are certainly bought but their literary merit is usually low, as befits the lowest common denominator of a mass reading public. This is the kind of public to which publishers address themselves and for which writers who wish to be successful must write, catering to a mentality which is not much above that of an intelligent teenager or bright child. In fact, books that appeal to children, such as the Harry Potter series, are also now read by their parents as well. To ensure such a marketing bonanza, publishers now bring out a plethora of titles hoping one or another of these, with the right marketing strategy, will catch the fancy of the now barely literate public and become a best-seller. All the other titles that fail to catch on quickly are rapidly remaindered or withdrawn, pulped and never heard of again. The accountants, who now rule the roost in publishing houses, do not tolerate market failures and they deem anything that does not bring immediate profits a failure. Even if a good book is written, which still happens occasionally, it has little chance to make its mark so a promising author is denied the opportunity to develop, as was still possible even fifty years ago.

There is a parallel paradox of Progress to that of literacy in the area of ethics, in so far as this is embodied in individuals rather than institutions. There is no doubt that on an institutional level our advanced Western societies are more

moral than societies ever before. No previous society had afforded greater ethical security to a wider range of people than our society. This is so not only within the boundaries of each country, but throughout the world in so far as Western norms apply. The way this is accomplished is by granting people moral rights and enshrining those rights in legislation which is then legally administered and policed. However, all rights depend for their realization on the legal system and thus ultimately on State power. They do not depend on the morality or good will or conscience of those who legislate them or those who adjudicate them or those who enforce them. In fact, they do not depend on individuals at all, on their moral character or anything else about them, such as their religious beliefs or secular ideologies, and this is where the ethical paradox of Progress arises.

This is perhaps the most perverse of all the paradoxes of Progress, for there is nothing that attests more to the triumph of Progress than the moral reform of society. This reform movement was initiated in Western societies during the Enlightenment to begin with, but eventually it was extended to all societies in the world. This was necessarily so because it was based on universal rights that held for all human beings. In revolutionary America these were the Lockian individual rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; and in revolutionary France they were the rights to *liberté, égalité, fraternité* that pertained more to groups and classes. Out of the latter there derived the political and ideological parties of liberalism, socialism and nationalism, each of which emphasized one or other of the triad of rights. Each of these would succeed to a greater or lesser extent in the various countries of Europe over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Each major European country had its own history of the struggle for rights and each developed its own somewhat different system of rights and how they were enshrined in law and enforced. At first universal rights for the whole of humanity only existed in theory, but gradually these, too, were established and enforced. Now they are defined in UN declarations and enforced through agreed international conventions to which nearly all nations declare their adherence, at least in public pronouncements; what they actually do is another matter. Perhaps the very first of the actively enforced universal rights was the emancipation of slaves and the abolition of slavery as an institution, which till that point had been accepted by all societies and civilizations, all religions and all ethical codes. Only a few very enlightened thinkers ever spoke out against it; and even when the American Constitution spoke of the inalienable right to liberty, little was done about it in law till after the Civil War. Before this, it was the emancipation movement in Britain aided by the British Navy that eventually succeeded in abolishing the slave trade and many countries followed suit by

banning the holding of slaves, though even to this day not quite all strenuously enforce it. It is ironic that the very same navy that engaged in colonialist atrocities, as in the Opium Wars against China, was at the same time instrumental in ridding mankind of its most ancient and perhaps worst scourges.

All this began with the Enlightenment and it succeeded in two of its main aims, to secularize and legalize morality. It removed morality from the hold that religion had exercised till then – as with Christian moral rules for example – by controlling the conscience of individuals via a system of sin and punishment, specifying virtues and vices that were supposedly conducive to salvation or damnation in the afterlife. This, of course, gave priests and pastors in general tremendous power over individual minds, especially where the faithful had to confess their sins regularly. The Enlightenment freed people from such domination by religious institutions, but at the same time it also relieved them of the need to worry too much about the state of their conscience or about exercising a conscience at all. Morality became secularized and no longer needed to be inculcated in individuals through fear of sin or desire for salvation, to be secured by righteous conduct and good deeds. Moral issues were subsequently adjudicated by social reformers, treated as a matter of rights and these were enshrined in law and enforced by the agencies of the State.

What happens when morality becomes a matter of rights at the behest of the State was only revealed in the twentieth century, when the totalitarian regimes came into power. This was when for many people moral conscience was redefined as the will of the Führer, as German philosophers such as Schmitt and Heidegger declared. It was much the same when Trotsky, and other Soviet philosophers asserted that the Party could do no wrong, as it was therefore the final arbiter of what was right and wrong. In practice this meant that what Stalin ordered was right by definition, as Trotsky was eventually to find out when it was too late to do anything about it. What did it matter that the Soviet constitution was the best in the world and gave people more rights than any other, as Stalin boasted, when there was no one but Stalin to enforce it?

The lack of moral will on the part of whole populations, who had come to rely on State sanctioned authorities to tell them what was right and wrong, was made evident when under totalitarian domination the laws were changed in line with Party ideology, or totally disregarded in practice. Those who came to be persecuted, incarcerated and tortured under the new laws found that there was no way to demand justice, since there was little point in appealing to a moral conscience that had atrophied. Most people blindly followed the dictates of their leaders, and when in positions of authority they felt self-righteous about carrying out what the ruling powers mandated.

Certainly, one cannot blame the Enlightenment for what happened under totalitarianism, as reactionaries are wont to do; and anyone with a sense of social justice would defend the system of rights that the Enlightenment preached and the reform movements that followed attained. But putting one's trust in rights and enlarging the scope of law ever further without regard to moral will and the conscience inherent in individuals is a risky undertaking, no matter how just a society happens to be. Our Western societies are governed justly in most respects that are at present attainable in law, and they are not in danger of any totalitarian relapses. Yet the failure to cultivate individual moral character is a clear and present danger; this was evident in America under President Trump, when blatant lies were fervently believed and adhered to by masses of people on his orders.

Our progressive societies are replete with rights but little care is devoted to moral education or character building in general. People are valued for their success, not for their upright moral standing; in fact, good people tend to be viewed as likely losers in the struggle of life rather than as winners. Hence, steadily but surely, a subtle process of demoralization is occurring. People can no longer trust or rely on each other as they used to do in the past. Now they seek to secure themselves by legal means, such as personal contracts and demands for rights. But rights can never take the place of morals, as we shall try to show.

These failures both in ethics and literacy are clear symptoms of the demise of civilization amidst all the prosperity, law and order, and all the other benefits that Progress has brought. Thanks to the Forces of Modernity, the main agents of Progress, we have attained standards of living and an orderly way of social life never before encountered in history or even envisaged as possible. But in the cultural, moral, artistic, intellectual or spiritual domains everything is darkening. This is the paradox of Progress at its most general.

The Resurgence of the East

1 Capitalist Despotism

Whatever one might say or think of the present globalized world, the first-ever world of conjoined humanity, it is undeniable that almost all that led up to it and made it possible came from the West. It could not have happened in the way it did without the modernizing drive launched by the West, which began five centuries ago. For good or ill, the West is responsible for what has become of humanity; it might be praised or blamed for this, but its historical importance cannot be denied. Unfortunately, this is precisely what some Western historians are intent on doing, as evident in this pronouncement by Felipe Fernández-Armesto:

When these creatures of my imagination, the Galactic Museum-Keepers, look back on our past, with the objectivity of a vantage point near the edge of the universe, ten thousand years in the future, they will centre their display on China and cram Western civilization into a corner in some small vitrine.¹

It is clear that Fernández-Armesto has confused value with historical importance. One can, if one so chooses, deny the West any value whatever, and deem it inferior to China, or even to the other so-called “civilizations” that Fernández-Armesto studies, such as those of the Laplanders or Inuit in the far north or those of the Tuareg or long vanished Garamantes in the Saharan south. One could even adopt a thoroughly Rousseauist standpoint and argue that primitive or pre-historic society is superior to civilization. All this makes sense, even if one does not agree with any of it. What does not make sense is to deny the West its historical importance and treat it purely as a curiosity crammed into “a corner in some small vitrine” of a universal exhibition in the future.

The West might be of no value, but that does not mean that it is of no importance as a causative agent in human history. The influence it exerted on human affairs at least for the last few centuries is objectively irrefutable. Without the West as the active agent, Globalization could not have taken place, for all

1 Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, *Civilization*, op. cit, 22.

the preconditions for it were prepared in the West. The Forces of Modernity, namely, modern capitalism, the modern State, modern science and technology, were all products of the West. This is what the West imparted to all the people of other civilizations by direct imposition or indirect example. Again, the West might be criticised for the way it went about doing so, or even for exerting its "bad" influence on the rest of humanity, but the fact that it did so is undeniable. That is what made it into the leading civilization in the world, regardless of how one might wish to judge it, and will give it centre place in any historical museum exhibition of the future.

At present there are many who wish to judge it badly and many more who desire to break away from it. There are Western historians who judge it as inferior to China but have no desire to break away from it and go to live in China, just as in the recent past there were many Communists who had no desire to emigrate to Russia. On the other hand, there are many Chinese Communists in China, above all in government circles, who do wish to break with the West and break up the global order created and until now managed by the West, so they can go their own way. Among these, as we shall see, are some Chinese intellectuals educated in Western ways. And China is not the only place where this kind of secession is taking place, it is happening in all the spheres of the old civilizations where until recently Modernity and Western civilization had seemed to triumph. It is taking place in Russia which used to be so close to Europe. It is occurring in the Muslim world where Western civilization never made all that much headway anyway; and there are stirrings of it in India where Western ways seemed to have been so successful under the British and even after independence as well. Opposition to the West has now become widespread, so much so that Samuel Huntington considered the world to be entering into a war of civilizations. One apparent instance of this, the looming contest between America and China, is what will concern us most in this chapter.

This is a shocking outcome for people brought up on Western values, regardless of their race or ethnic origins. Until as recently as half a century ago it was explicitly or implicitly assumed by all so-called secular enlightened people all over the world that there was but the one advanced civilization, more or less that of the Western nations. This was identified with Modernity and Progress to which all modern people aspired, both Western and Eastern, in so far as the latter sought to attain what the former had already acquired, namely, the trappings of civilized living. Among the latter, there were a few nations who sought to achieve this modernizing goal by means of democracy and capitalism, following along the lines of American ideology, but most went the other way and sought it along the lines of Socialist ideology, with greater or lesser reference

to Marxism and an orientation towards the Soviet Union. But the goal was the same for both parties, to reach and if possible, overtake the Western nations in all the key factors that counted in their view as civilization, usually identified with so-called modernization.

There was nothing new in this attitude. It was not usually imposed by colonialism or inspired by Western propaganda or exerted by force on people unwilling to accept it – though sometimes it was, with unfortunate consequences. The signs of Western superiority were evident to every clear-thinking ruler of every independent country starting with Peter the Great in Russia at the start of the eighteenth century. They all grasped sooner or later that they must imitate the West or perish. The Ottoman sultans were very reluctant to realize this truth and did indeed perish; it was the secularist Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who saved the rump of their empire in Turkey and began the process of Westernizing it as a secular nation-state.

According to Atatürk, there was only one civilization worthy of that name, the European, apart from which there was no other. This might have been an extreme response even at that time in the 1920s, but it was one more or less followed by all the other leaders for the liberation of their countries. They all thought that the benighted obscurantism of their native traditions was not civilization, a term they adopted from the European languages for none such existed in their own. The leaders of the Meiji Restoration sought for a better compromise between civilization and traditional Japan, but there were not many that followed their lead elsewhere. It was only partly so for Sun Yat-sen in China or for Reza Khan, the new Shah of Persia. After decolonization most of the leaders of the new nations mostly followed a Westernizing course with but few compromises with native traditions; this was certainly true of Nehru in India and Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, and only slightly less so for Soekarno in Indonesia and Nasser in Egypt. Whether or not one now thinks this was the right course to take is another matter. But at the time there seemed none other.

These attitudes began to change very slowly and at first very hesitantly in the 1980s, and have only begun to be widely abandoned during the new millennium. In the Islamic countries the change came much more abruptly in Iran with the Khomeini Islamic revolution in 1979. This brought about a virulent and violent rejection of Western ways, those that had been gingerly fostered by the Shah Reza Mohammed, such as the liberation of women, land reform at the expense of the Shia clergy, and cultural innovations. Once in power the ayatollahs only kept those aspects of Western modernity necessary to run a modern state and economy, while severely repressing all others, much to the chagrin of the educated and sophisticated upper strata in Iran. The fundamentalist revival among the Shia was matched by that of the Sunnis, initially

promoted and financed by the ruling traditionalists of Saudi Arabia. Both of these anti-Western religious movements, largely inadvertently, produced terrorist organizations which began open warfare against the West. It was this, more than anything else, that inspired Samuel Huntington's thesis of a coming war of civilizations, which we shall presently examine.²

Apart from Islam, the assertion of pre-Western indigenous nativist tendencies was much slower in coming and did not take the form of direct aggression against the West. Nevertheless, even at the very height of globalization there was a slow and steady reversion to older traditions. Whether this in fact amounted to a revival and restoration of the old civilizations, as Huntington seems implicitly to maintain, we shall consider in due course. But what it did mean was that traditional cultural forms were once more brought back and their practices encouraged by the new regimes. People were allowed to take up the old religions in ex-Communist countries where religion had been formerly banned. The state agencies and public media gave themselves over to a replay of the glories of the historical past. The old arts and antiquated lore, frequently survivals from the old civilizations, were once more revived in the spirit of national heritage. As we shall see, this was not being done for the love of culture alone, it also has a legitimating role for the new regimes that are coming into being and surreptitiously establishing themselves.

As part of a revived traditionalism, the ruling parties in most of the old ex-Communist countries and in some of the ex-Colonialist ones, were reverting to older pre-Western forms of rule and types of law. This invariably meant a return to aspects of the imperial systems which had historically prevailed, especially those in Asia that used to be called Oriental Despotisms. This is now a much-disparaged term, as it seems to reflect badly on non-Western forms of government in contrast to Western ones, and has generally fallen out of favour. But there is no need to dispense with it for that reason alone, since keeping it in use will preserve much of the sound scholarship of the past. As recently as the 1950s Karl August Wittfogel wrote a masterful account of non-Western civilizations in these terms.³ As we have elsewhere argued, this needs correcting and updating in the light of more recent knowledge, but that is no reason to abandon it altogether.⁴ Unless one wishes to engage in an ideological

2 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1996).

3 Karl August Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).

4 Harry Redner, *Totalitarianism, Globalization, Colonialism: The Destruction of Civilization since 1914* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2014).

rectification of names, it were best to retain the expression so as not to end up saying the same thing in more euphemistic words, which is what historians who cater to native sensitivities do.

A recent exception to this practice is John Keane who has designated the current successors of the old imperial regimes as the “new despotisms”.⁵ Keane is well aware of the eighteenth-century origins of the term and its later uses down to Alexis de Tocqueville, though, regrettably he is unaware of Wittfogel. He provides cogent reasons as to why it is preferable to “authoritarianism”, which he calls a “glib and ethically questionable category”.⁶ We shall follow Keane’s lead and call the new anti-democratic regimes “despotic capitalist” forms of government. It is necessary to bring in the term “capitalist” in order to emphasize that, unlike the older empires which strove for economic self-sufficiency, these new neo-imperial states are part of a global system of trade and production arrangements which thus far has been managed by the Western powers and run along capitalist lines through international governing bodies such as the World Trade Organization. Economic globalization is something that the rulers of these regimes wish to maintain for it is clearly conducive to the trade that is providing rising standards of living for their people. For this purpose, they have been granted a limited degree of economic freedom so as to give their economies the semblance of capitalism.

However, speaking of economic freedom in this context does not mean that in capitalist despotism there is any fundamental right to private property, that is, to own assets and dispose of them as one sees fit. Security of ownership and other such legal guarantees do not exist since the ruling power can always find a way of dispossessing anyone and expropriating their wealth; or alternatively, the government can determine how that wealth is to be deployed or used and what obligations its owners must fulfil. Thus, for example, in China all citizens, companies and organizations are formally obliged to cooperate in “intelligence work”. This is not so clearly spelled out in other despotic capitalist states, but such implied conditions are still there especially for companies that trade abroad. Thus, the term “capitalist” in the expression despotic capitalism must be heavily qualified by the term “despotic”, in fact, the two terms function as a compound in which neither is fully independent of the other.

Keane has perhaps not taken full note of the “capitalist” side of these systems, but he has provided ample justification and a full description of the “despotism” side. He defines it as follows:

5 John Keane, *The New Despotism* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

6 *Ibid.*, 212.

... today's despotism is a new type of pseudo-democratic government led by rulers skilled in the arts of manipulating and meddling with people's lives, marshalling their support, and winning their conformity ... Despotisms are top-down pyramids of power that defy political gravity by nurturing the willing subservience and docility of their subjects.⁷

Keane provided ample material in support of his thesis that the new despotisms are becoming pervasive throughout the world and constitute the major challenge to Western democracy. He casts his net very wide, perhaps too wide for our purpose, for he brings in failing democracies such as Hungary together with traditional kingdoms such as Saudi Arabia. We shall seek to limit our treatment of despotic capitalism just to those regimes that had an imperial historical past, namely, those that once were Oriental Despotisms, and this means principally those located in Eurasia, above all China, Russia, Iran and Turkey.

It has become evident that in all of these countries new "emperors" have been enthroned, that is, their leaders have become rulers for life. This has happened in China with the accession of Xi Jinping, who has abandoned the older system of collegiate rule and leadership rotation introduced by Deng Xiaoping and maintained by his successors. The norms of legality brought in at that time are also being jettisoned, and a new surveillance apparatus based on information technology has been introduced to supplement and tighten the traditional ways of oversight and control. The hereditary principle of succession has not yet come into effect, except that the children of high Party cadres, the so-called princelings, are accorded extraordinary opportunities for enrichment and advancement, and to some extent granted privileges and immunities as a kind of aristocracy. Many in the ruling elite and Xi Jinping himself are the children of revolutionary leaders. In North Korea, however, hereditary succession at the top has always been in force and an elite Party aristocracy has come into being as well. In both these countries one might take this as a reversion to traditional forms of rule.

Similar developments are taking place elsewhere. In Russia Putin has declared himself ruler for life through a recent referendum and he is bringing back some of the trappings of old Czarism. To bolster his legitimacy, he has overseen a revival of the Russian Orthodox Church, whose hierarchy is unequivocally behind him, as they always were supportive of the Czars of old. He has surrounded himself with a court of cronies, known as oligarchs, who

⁷ Ibid, 14.

have amassed extraordinary wealth, so much so that Russia is now one of the most inegalitarian countries on earth, having been one of the most egalitarian under Communism. Thus, the basis of a new Russian aristocracy has also been laid.

Throughout the Muslim ecumene new sultans are springing up. Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey is establishing himself as a modern successor to the Caliphs, and actively promoting the old Ottoman imperial traditions as well as a still moderate religious Islamization. He is doing as much as he can to undo Atatürk's Westernizing legacy, particularly in respect of culture. There are similar developments in other Islamic lands, such as in Egypt where Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is establishing himself as the new Pharaoh; though in this case, Islamization cannot proceed very far since the Muslim Brotherhood are his deadly enemies, and any resurgence of religion would redound in their favour. In Saudi Arabia a single power-holder is emerging in the figure of Prince Mohammed bin Salman who has consolidated his hold over the old royal family power-sharing arrangements. Since the Islamic revolution in 1979 Iran has remained a clerical theocracy under Khamenei with a praetorian force, the Revolutionary Guard, to keep him in power, despite popular opposition that sporadically breaks out in futile demonstrations.

Countries that are still democratic are also evincing similar tendencies towards traditionalism. The key case is India where the Westernizing tendencies of the Congress Party and Nehru socialism have been decisively rejected and defeated by the BJP, which resorts to *Hindutva*, or aggressive religious Hinduism, to pre-empt Congress Party opposition and ensure re-election; and at the same time, it is used to repress the Muslim minority. This new spirit of religious revival, bordering on fanaticism, is being stirred up among the masses through symbolic gestures, such as the conversion of mosques into temples. The previously pursued secularizing battle against the caste system is most probably being surreptitiously abandoned though the evidence is still too scanty for a definite conclusion.

This general reassertion of local particularism in Asia by no means amounts to a restoration of the old civilizations; as Robert Kaplan puts it, "it isn't the so-called clash of civilizations that is taking place, but the clash of artificially reconstructed civilizations."⁸ The old pre-colonial and pre-Modern civilizations had decayed or been destroyed beyond any revival or resurrection as civilizations. What is now being brought back into currency are their moribund

8 Robert D. Kaplan, *The Return of Marco Polo's World: War, Strategy and American Interests in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Random House, 2018), 7.

remains, given a semblance of new life through artificial reconstruction. But this is perhaps better than leaving them dead and buried. Better the recovery of Chinese religious and cultural traditions, the remnants of Chinese civilization, under Xi Jinping than the wholesale vandalism and destruction under Mao Tse Tung.

While the non-Western world is undergoing its own cultural reconstitution following the ravages of colonialism, accompanied by a degree of nationalistic fervour, there are those in the West who are undertaking the opposite reactive process and turning against their own civilization or what is still left of it. Guilt over Colonialism, and its usually accompanying racism, has prompted a sense of shame and remorse among faculty and students in Western universities, especially those who are professionally concerned with the study of non-Western countries. These feelings were taken up and amplified by ideological radicals to whom any whiff of racial superiority was the ultimate sin worthy of total damnation. According to them, there could be nothing good about colonialism. Such views are readily taken up by students coming from the ex-colonial and other non-Western countries who now take a very different attitude to Western culture to that of their predecessors a century ago; these went to Western universities precisely to acquire this culture. Their descendants – who come in far larger numbers and are much more assertive – take a hostile and aggrieved attitude to the West even while they are immersed in Western popular culture and practice Western styles of living. Consequently, they promote such subjects as post-colonial studies which are endemically biased against Western civilization.

To oppose and counter such biases is now no easy matter for one has to confront views and values voiced by people, among them many highly placed academics, who have little idea of what civilization is and the role that culture plays in it. There is now a general acknowledgement that there were various civilizations in the past and that the West was only one among many others. The work of Spengler, Toynbee, McNeil and many others has now been widely absorbed, even though in a much simplified and clichéd form. However, it is precisely the same theories of civilizational multiplicity which have concealed and obscured the crucial differences between civilizations. Not all civilizations are developmentally alike, there are various types, some earlier and cruder and others higher and more sophisticated; the latter kind are those that emerged out of the Axial Age due to the promotion of literacy and ethics, as we explained in the previous chapter. Among all the post Axial Age civilizations that of Europe played a unique and special role in that it was the sole source of Modernity, despite earlier contributions from some of the others. In particular, from it originated the Forces of Modernity, viz. capitalism, the rational-legal

State, science and technology. Initially these four institutional arrangements were emulated and duplicated, with variations, by all countries which aspired to Modernity.

In short, most of what the non-Western world has acquired from the West pertains to these material, organizational and rationalizing forces and forms. As far as the values and norms of culture are concerned, those which used to be considered the hallmarks of civilization, it was much more a selective matter of choice to what extent a non-Western country tried to take these up as well. Europeanization was the term for this cultural side of Modernity that was adopted by other societies. To what extent a society chose to Europeanize in this cultural sense varied extensively depending on numerous factors, such as its own culture and its past historical experience with the West. In general, Islamic societies, which have long been in a hostile relation with Western Christianity, have tended to shun European culture, whereas Far Eastern societies have been much more amenable to it. Hence, the extreme contrast in this respect between the Arab countries and Japan. A somewhat lesser contrast is that between Taiwan and mainland China at present, though there were periods when China was much more susceptible to European culture than it has become since the Communist takeover.

China has been Europeanized in cultural respects only to a very limited degree, mostly so in coastal enclaves like Hong Kong and Shanghai but far less so the further one moved into the interior. The long reign of Communism, despite its Western derived Marxist ideology, has basically not altered this cultural incompatibility. It partly explains the reluctance of the Chinese political elite to take up liberal democracy and Western notions of law or individual rights. India is the opposite case in this respect; promoted by nearly two centuries of colonialism and the close interaction between the British administrators and the Brahmins, Western education and culture is still sought after. Nothing like that occurred in China, except briefly in a few cities where there were European extra-territorial concessions.

Such factors of culture also underlie Huntington's thesis of a clash of civilizations, even if civilizations in the old sense are no longer present.⁹ China interacts closely with America as far as the Forces of Modernity are concerned: there is still a continuous and sustained economic partnership, in education, science and technology there is extensive interaction; and until recently there was considerable political cooperation on the international stage. Nevertheless, the basic attitudes to culture and consequently their mentalities are totally at

9 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, op. cit.

variance and the differences seem almost insurmountable. American popular culture is for the present still tolerated, but might not be so for much longer, and it does not go much further than that.

Since the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, starting with the Iranian revolution, a veritable cultural chasm has been opened up between the West and these radical religious movements throughout the Islamic world. This is a cultural battle taking the form of religious war much more than it is anything else. Something similar has been taking place in Russia where old Slavophil tendencies have been stirred up by Putin and the Russian Orthodox Church that he favours. As in China, the long reign of Communism has not moderated these traditional anti-Western attitudes.

Many of the major tensions in the world are owing to such cultural factors, which feed into other rivalries in the geo-political and economic spheres. Huntington was certainly correct and far-seeing in predicting that clashes would occur in border areas. The most obvious case he noted is the Ukraine, historically a border region where cultures and religions clashed. Its population is split between those in the Western part who tend towards Europe and those on the Eastern part who side with Russia. This opposition has led to civil war, stoked by Russia, and to a major falling out between Russia and Europe. The extension of NATO into Poland and the Baltic states had already aggravated this relation by arousing Russian traditional fears of European invasion going back many centuries. Huntington was certainly prescient from a geo-political Realist point of view in anticipating this and other such contentious situations all over the world.

However, does this amount to a war of civilizations? How can it be a war of civilizations when civilizations barely exist anymore? What can it now mean to speak of China or Russia or Iran or India or Japan or even of America itself as a civilization when they are all parts of an integrated global world economy and all share similar Forces of Modernity? All serve diversified economic functions in a global chain of production: some provide the raw materials and energy resources, others carry out processes of production, still others constitute the main financial and design centres, these are usually also the main markets. The science and technology they utilize and develop are everywhere the same and shared globally through a system of open publication, patenting and intellectual property rights arrangements; they are all linked by global institutions of education, such as major universities to which students from all over the world are drawn. The various states might be governed differently, but they all feature organizational bureaucratic arrangements, international exchanges, diplomatic communication and membership of international organizations,

the United Nations being the foremost among many others to whose charter provisions all at least normally subscribe.

Undeniably there is fierce competition between these states in all the major dimensions. There is economic competition for markets and favourable terms of trade. There is political competition for spheres of influence and international prestige. There are even military confrontations, arms races and minor wars in disputed areas, though the fear of nuclear holocaust keeps these down to manageable proportions. There is also cultural competition in promoting the local popular cultures internally and keeping at bay the cultural commodities of others, but at the same time exporting one's own to others. Cultural competition of this kind is generally closely tied in with economic competition and is part of an economy of cultural capitalism that operates throughout the world. Bollywood now competes with Hollywood, and Mickey Mouse with Asterix.

This competitive activity is becoming aggravated because of the stance of national self-assertion that each of the major powers is now adopting. Largely this is because the non-Western nations are becoming ever so much stronger and more confident, and now feel capable of taking on the Western nations in all major spheres of competition. The growing clash between China and America is a key instance of this, and it demonstrates that the previous situation of a unipolar world in which America ruled supreme is no longer warranted as America grows relatively weaker and China stronger. These clashes are also promoted by an invigorated nationalistic sense of cultural difference and uniqueness that makes it no longer possible for non-Western nations to subscribe to the cultural values of foreign powers, especially Western ones. This is further aggravated by current internal policies of reviving the old cultural beliefs and practices, which were previously repressed by colonial rulers or downplayed by a surviving sense of Western superiority still held by previous generations of native leaders who undertook the struggle for liberation, and who were generally schooled in Western universities.

Thus, in conclusion we can assess that Huntington was partly right from the geopolitical point of view in foreseeing rising tensions between the major powers of the world as they gained increasing strength and self-confidence and felt able to challenge the Western powers, especially America. This certainly fits the bill as far as China is concerned; but with Russia, Iran and Turkey there are other issues as well to be considered. There is Putin's intense resentment against the West coming from what he believes is the role it played in the break-up of the Soviet Union; according to him, the greatest tragedy of the twentieth century. The developments in the Ukraine have also stirred up in him traditional Russian xenophobia and paranoia about foreign invasions. In

the case of Khomeini, the religious hatred of the West is almost pathological and takes a rabid religious form. Erdogan's resentment of the West does not reach anywhere near that mark, but there are also religious motives at play driving him away from the West and towards involvements throughout the Middle East and North Africa. He evinces a historical yen for Ottoman greatness and suzerainty over the whole Arab world. It is beginning to look as if together with Russia and Iran, under the over-all lead and instigation of China, Turkey might be drifting away from the Western orbit and becoming a satellite of an anti-Western coalition of Eurasian powers. Huntington did not consider such a new geo-political possibility, but it has been taken up and briefly adumbrated by Kaplan.

2 The Eurasian Axis

According to Kaplan, we are now entering into a global confluence of powers which extends over the Eurasian continental landmass and is assuming some of the features of the Mongol empire at the time of the Yuan dynasty in China. As he puts it tersely, "Mongol grand strategy was built on commerce much more than on war. If you want to understand China's grand strategy today, look no further than Kublai Khan's empire."¹⁰ The Mongol empire at its furthest extension went way beyond China into central Asia, Persia, Russia and at times deep into the Middle East, Turkey and the northern parts of India. Under Tamerlane, who claimed descent from Genghis Khan, it briefly went even further. According to Kaplan, what we are witnessing now is a gradual coalescing of the powers who now comprise most of these regions into some kind of Eurasian bloc, as he sees it:

In the past, Eurasia was simply too vast to work to the advantage of any one power. The Mongol empire from Genghis Khan to Tamerlane (and including Kublai Khan) was the singular, stunning exception. But as technology has collapsed distance, advancing the possibility of trade and supply chains, there is now the possibility of some semblance of Eurasian unity among China, Russia, and Iran, with China as the first among equals, just as in Marco Polo's day.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid, 35.

¹¹ Robert Kaplan, *The Return of Marco Polo's World*, op. cit. 32.

Kaplan does not include Turkey in this new Eurasian line up, but he might easily have done so as well. Turkey under Erdogan is coming into line with the other Eurasian powers as it is steadily being drawn into Asia and away from Europe. Its regime is moving away from liberal democracy and becoming more of a capitalist despotism, its economy linking up with China, and its culture looking back to its imperial Ottoman past.

All this is very far removed from Huntington's now dated prognostications of a clash of civilizations in a multipolar world of powers. The world seems to be once more shaping up into a contest between two power blocs, those of West and East. The latter we have already identified as Eurasia, the continental alliance, the former is the old familiar Western alliance of America, Europe, Japan Australia and a few others. These are all oceanic powers protected by the US Navy; hence we might designate them together as Oceania, using the term coined by George Orwell in his novel *1984*. The battle for influence over the globe is rapidly shaping itself as that between Oceania and Eurasia. It has not yet reached the level of a Cold War but might well do so in the near future. It need not necessarily reach that degree of intensity; it could taper off into intense economic competition compatible with cooperation in other respects. But it will take far-seeing and able statesmanship to keep the conflict from degenerating further.

The four powers we have highlighted, China, Russia, Iran and Turkey, are developing in a way contrary to Western expectations of the prevalence of a liberal democratic global order throughout the world. They are moving ever further in the direction of capitalist despotism, incorporating advanced science and technology and most of the structural features of the bureaucratic State. In other words, they are maintaining the Forces of Modernity but at the same time pivoting back to their own traditional forms of governance, which in all four cases happen to have been Oriental Despotisms.

Capitalist despotism is becoming a well-established amalgam of the modern and the traditional; it is modern and Western in so far as it is capitalist and part of a global economy, but it is also traditionalist and Eastern in so far as it is a despotism and based on old imperial models of rule. All of the Asian powers were once great empires, memories of which persist to this day and shape their aspirations, despite the modernizing developments they have undergone, mostly in the course of the twentieth century. In some respects, this process had already started during the previous centuries, as in the case of Russia where it dates from the early eighteenth century. Undoubtedly the Forces of Modernity are by now everywhere firmly in place and cannot be abrogated short of withdrawing from the international system, which is currently suicidal. Theocratic Iran under Khomeini came close to that in the first

flush of the Islamic revolution, but under Khamenei, his successor, wiser and cooler heads prevailed and most of the modern institutions brought in by the late Shah were left in place, subject to strict clerical oversight.

Russia under Peter the Great was the first example of a policy that deliberately imposed Westernization on a non-Western civilization. In this case, however, the disparity was not all that great since Russian traditional culture was based on a Byzantine-inspired Orthodox Christianity not all that far removed from Western Christianity. Both geographically and historically, Russia was never completely cut off from Europe but always engaged with it both in war and peace, particularly with the neighbouring Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth. Thus, the Petrine reforms did not have to start off by confronting a completely foreign civilization. Hence Russia could begin a rapid process of Europeanization, beginning with its military and land-holding aristocracy; and it soon emerged as a European power, becoming well-integrated politically, culturally and economically with Europe. However, there was always a strong traditionalist, despotic streak in place, that of Czarism and the Russian Orthodox Church. If anything, Communist rule, especially under Stalin, strengthened this aspect rather than weakening it, by contrast with what was starting to happen before the Revolution.

Westernization was a much more severe wrench in the case of Japan, the first Asian power to modernize. It took a forcible American intrusion to begin the process, but once it was under way it became self-generating after the Meiji Restoration in 1868. As the term suggests, this had both traditionalist and modernizing aspects to it, for paradoxically in the name of a restored tradition a new modernity was introduced which would undo that tradition. But at the same time, the new modern institutions were so designed as to preserve much of traditional culture within a modern setting. The position of the Emperor was central to this balancing act.

At first Japan seemed to be developing along liberal democratic European lines, but from the late 1920s onwards it soon followed the worst extremes of European nationalism. The army took command of foreign policy and began a campaign of conquest which only ended with total defeat. Under American occupation and an American inspired constitution, Japan became firmly democratic and pro-Western, with the emperor assuming a purely titular role. A large part of that role is to maintain some of the traditions of Japanese culture. Thus, the traditional script has been preserved and writing has not been rendered alphabetic, as happened in Turkey. This ensures the survival of much of traditional culture even while Western culture is saturating the country, especially in popular American commercial fashions.

Japan has struck a balance between modernity and tradition that some other Asian countries are likely to follow, especially those that have gone down the liberal democratic route in their politics. South Korea has proceeded in the same way, going even further perhaps, in that many of its people have become Christians. The two independent Chinese republics, Taiwan and Singapore, have followed suit. The ex-colonial countries of South-East Asia, such as the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia, have each developed their own liberal democratic variants more or less successfully. Indonesia is a crucial test case for it is a large Muslim populated country, one that represents at present almost the proving ground of whether Islam is compatible with liberal democracy. However, an even more crucial instance is India, the largest democracy in the world, though coming under intense strain on account of its Hinduist government. We shall return to it later.

After the fall of Communism, it was generally believed that all the former totalitarian regimes would become liberal even if not fully democratic, particularly so those of China and Russia. But since the start of the new millennium this became less likely, and since the accession of Xi Jinping and Putin it is now apparent that it is most unlikely, for they have reinstituted a form of despotism. The reasons for this outcome have obviously something to do with the personality of these two strong leaders, but much more so with historical realities, though these leaders have been responsible for translating national predispositions and aspirations into policies. There are two crucial factors behind these policies: the determination of the Communist Party in China to maintain power, now through the agency of Xi Jinping one of its own sons, and the fact that in Russia the secret police, the FSR, the successor of the dreaded KGB, has grasped hold of the levers of power, through the agency of Putin, one of its own alumni. But these two political organizations would not have been able to achieve such a secure hold on power were it not for strong tendencies favouring firm rule in these societies, encouraging the population to support them or at least acquiesce in their machinations. These are tendencies towards despotism that go back long into their historic past and manifest themselves as a general longing for strong rulers with undisputed authority. Such rulers are believed necessary to maintain unity and law and order, since there has been no experience of any other way of doing so, and there is an ingrained fear of social disorder and chaos, born of memories of periods in history of such "times of trouble", some as recent as the civil wars in China and Russia.

Both China and Russia were great empires with a glorious past, but both suffered extended periods of turmoil and great instability when centralized rule failed and sheer anarchy prevailed. Only a few generations ago China went through more than half a century of constant upheaval and civil strife, following

the fall of the Qing imperial dynasty in 1912. Imperial rule was followed by the misrule of war lords; which in turn led to all kind of civil wars: between the Nationalist Kuomintang Party and the warlords, then between the Nationalists and the Communists, then came the Japanese invasion and further civil war ending with the victory of the Communists under Mao. This, however, did not bring peace and stability, but further social chaos as Mao embarked on his collectivization programs, and then sought to secure his power through the Cultural Revolution. Stability and the unity of the country, together with increasing prosperity, is what the vast majority of Chinese people desire; and that is what the Communist Party has now delivered. At the same time, there is the historic memory ingrained in Chinese minds of a great imperial and civilizational past when China was ruled by an emperor and was the “middle kingdom” and all the countries around it were vassal states. All this makes for capitalist despotism as the preferred form of government and for assertive foreign policy.

The Russians went through equally traumatic experiences during the twentieth century. Russia's time of troubles began with the First World War, followed by the Revolution and the extended Civil War during which the Czarist Empire briefly split up into its constituent ethnic nationalities. Only strong and highly authoritarian Bolshevik rule kept the Russian empire together. This was followed by Stalin's totalitarianism and its collectivization and industrialization programs which was interrupted by the Second World War with its huge loss of life and destruction of industry. When Communism fell, there was another bout of chaos as the Soviet Empire belatedly broke up into its constituent ethnic entities and as economic breakdown ensued because of the precipitate and ill-thought through policies of privatisation and the lurch to rapacious “cow-boy” capitalism under the presidency of Yeltsin. The overwhelming majority of Russians now desire nothing more than social order and the security of their livelihood on the level to which they are traditionally accustomed. A small minority of the educated city dwellers, might have a yen for freedom and liberal democracy, but most are content with Putin and his FRS cronies and oligarchs, who provide stability and a modicum of prosperity, at least enough to meet the very modest Russian needs. At the same time, by building up a powerful army, Putin seems to be restoring something of the prestige and influence that Russia had always had in the surrounding regions and as a global power since the Second World War. Thus, his incursion into Crimea and the Ukraine was generally approved by Russians and won him increased support.

There are strong reasons, both contemporary political and nationalistic reasons, drawing on a long imperial past, for why China and Russia have turned to capitalist despotism as their national destinies. It is similarly the case in

Iran and Turkey, but for somewhat different reasons. Both of these are Islamic countries which had imperial regimes that only came to an end after the First World War when the Ottoman dynasty and the Qajar dynasty were deposed. A short period of disruption followed before Turkey, shorn of its imperial possessions, consolidated itself as a secular republic under Atatürk's authoritarian rule; and Persia acquired a new secularist dynasty of Shahs under Reza Khan, like Atatürk a former army general. Gradually increasing Westernization seemed to be succeeding, to the point where Turkey became a liberal democracy and Iran might have done so as well in due course. But a crucial factor undermined these developments and worked to bring back a form of traditionalist authoritarianism. That factor is the still undiminished influence of Islam.

The secularization and Westernizing policies of the governments in Iran and Turkey provoked strong negative reactions from the Muslim clergy and great dissatisfaction among the more traditionalist minded classes, such as the rural peasantry and the lower middle class, such as the bazaar merchants in the cities. The key issues for them are Sharia law and opposition to any liberalization that would infringe on the traditional repressed status of women. The more that Westernizing rulers sought to promote rational-legal institutions of justice and to emancipate women, the more they stoked the fires of Islamic discontent. In Iran this broke out in outright revolution that brought to power a theocratic despotism not seen since the Safavid dynasty. And like the Safavid shahs, the new clerical rulers are pursuing traditional Persian policies of aggrandizement in the Middle East and throughout the Muslim ecumene. In Turkey a much more orderly process ensued, ironically made possible by the very success of democracy that Muslim clerics have always detested and shunned, for the ballot-box brought the traditionalist AK party into power under Erdogan. It has been consolidating its hold over all the major institutions of society, especially over the courts, and is now transforming Turkey into a capitalist despotism. At the same time, it has also been reviving memories of the Ottoman imperial past and undertaking a foreign policy to restore something of the Ottoman influence throughout the Arab Middle East and Mediterranean regions where formerly the Ottomans ruled.

There is much commonality between the four major powers that have turned to capitalist despotism. As such, their relation to the Western powers and all other liberal democratic states is ambivalent and very fraught. In so far as they are capitalist and still governed by the Forces of Modernity and dependent on a global market, they need to maintain close relations with the West, with both Europe and America, as well as with the international order in general, which was instituted and is still dominated by the West. Being deprived of those relations, as the sanctions against Iran and Russia have shown however,

is severely debilitating: for Iran as it is totally dependent on oil exports, and also for Russia to a lesser degree as it is much more self-sufficient. Turkey, nominally still part of NATO, is being very careful not to do anything which would incur such penalties. China is in a much stronger position to go it alone, but is still far from ready to do so, as we saw even when it was subject to threats of onerous tariffs by the recent Trump administration. It is still biding its time, in line with Deng Xiaoping's injunction; but under Xi Jinping it is no longer hiding its strength.

However, as the exponents of a new form of despotism, as Keane maintains, these powers are hostile to the West on ideological and political grounds. They fear liberal democracy which some of their more educated and culturally Westernized people espouse, such as the students who launched the Tiananmen Square demonstrations in Beijing in 1989, and as analogous demonstrations by students and other more enlightened elements in Russia, Iran and Turkey have shown. The current regimes seek to counter such opposition by espousing capitalist despotism and an ideology of good government more in line with their people's native traditions and religions. But at the same time, they appeal to the general international principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of states. By this means, they can support despotic rulers in many other countries and blunt the attempts by the West to extend liberal democracy or invoke human rights principles or attempt to impose sanctions for any such breaches. They thus gain allies among many would-be dictators throughout the world. Traditionalist despotism has great appeal for all such rulers.

Traditionalist rule is an ideological component of capitalist despotism, and it now acts first and foremost as a legitimating device. It is the means by which despotic parties and leaders can maintain their authority when previous forms of legitimation have been discredited. Thus, with the fall of doctrinaire Communism in both Russia and China, though not so spectacularly in the latter, it was no longer possible to appeal to Marxism or the Revolution or even to the old charismatic leaders, such as Lenin and Stalin or even Mao. In China, the Communist Party – which is Communist in name only since the time Deng espoused capitalism – had to develop a new way of legitimating its continuing hold on power. In Russia, since the old Communist Party was dissolved, the new despotic power holder, Putin, has similarly to justify his rule and command obedience, quite apart from the formalities of elections, which everyone in Russia knows are rigged but out of habit people still go along and vote. There are analogous problems of legitimacy to be faced by the regimes in Iran and Turkey, which, as we shall see, can only be met by recourse to traditionalist

means, even though there, too, elections are still maintained, in Turkey without any overt subterfuges or chicaneries so far.

The issue of legitimate authority is crucial to the holding of political power in all societies throughout history, as Weber famously declared. The question which is of crucial concern to us now is this: what is the legitimacy basis that obtains in the case of the four despotic capitalist regimes? According to Weber, there are but three ideal-type forms of legitimacy: rational-legal, charismatic and traditional. Which one or which combinations of these are current in the four countries we have been considering? They are clearly not the same ones as those which obtain in the liberal democratic West.

Rational-legal legitimation is that which is current in the West. It generally takes a constitutionalist form whereby the right to rule and the various powers and limits of the ruling authority are prescribed by written constitutional laws and unwritten conventions. Generally, the right to hold office is established by democratic means of one kind or another, particularly so when the rulers are taken to be representatives of the people and govern in their name. Such liberal-democratic constitutional arrangements, when they have the force of fundamental laws, further specify the prerogatives, divisions of power, limits to power and all kinds of other arrangements incumbent upon those who hold authority and govern on the basis of rational-legal legitimation. The American Constitution is one such paradigmatic case of this formal specification of legitimate rule and the Westminster informal parliamentary variant is another. All other democratic states combine features drawn from either or both of these, and some constitutions have extra plebiscitary features of direct democracy.

Obviously, the new despotic regimes do not gain their primary legitimacy through any such rational-legal arrangements. However, they are not bereft of some of these constitutional trappings of rational legitimacy. They generally have constitutions, no matter to what slight degree these are relevant or binding in effect, for they are mainly intended for show. They have parliaments chosen by election, no matter how rigged or restricted these are in practice. Even where there are no parliamentary elections, as in China, there is still the pretence of consensus by means of congresses of regional representatives and Party delegates, as in the former Peoples Democracies. But this is not where the main means of legitimacy are derived.

The old Communist regimes obtained their legitimacy primarily by charismatic means, even though they, too, had constitutions and a sham democracy. The right to rule was established by revolution and by the undertaking to carry out an ideological program, such as Marxist socialism, which was accepted as an article of faith. The success of the leaders in carrying out the revolution was their guarantee of the right to rule; and their successors inherit

this right according to what Weber called the “charisma of office”. In the Soviet Union Lenin was the initial charismatic ruler, and his successors, starting with Stalin, held power through the charisma of their office as Secretary General of the Party. In China Mao was the initial charismatic ruler, his successors acquired their charisma from him, even though beginning with Deng they went against his policies and totally departed from the Communist ideology of the revolution.

The inheritance of the charisma of office is still a factor of legitimacy in China, which is the main reason that Mao cannot be denounced or renounced and why his portrait still hangs over Tiananmen Square. But this is now a diminishing factor for the paramount ruler and the ruling elite. In Russia it has been relegated to a great extent to a still more subsidiary role, for Putin does not consider himself, nor is he taken by the people, as a direct successor to Stalin, as the former Communist rulers did. Nevertheless, Putin has not completely abandoned recourse to Stalin, for he has placed him among the pantheon of great Russian rulers starting with Ivan the Terrible. But to do so he has had to absolve him at least to some extent of his heinous crimes against the Russian people. In China Mao’s crimes are now unmentionable in public.

Only in the more recently revolutionary regime of Iran is the attempt still being made to uphold revolutionary charisma in earnest, and Khamenei is taken as the direct successor to the great leader Khomeini. But this is beginning to wear thin with most Iranians. In Turkey Erdogan distances himself as much as possible from Atatürk, the revolutionary charismatic founder of their secular republic. He is beginning to craft a different kind of legitimating role for himself. Nevertheless, Atatürk’s stature as founder of the Turkish state is still upheld.

Given that rational-legitimacy has never played much of a role in these countries and that revolutionary charisma has waned, a different basis of legitimacy must now be invoked by their rulers. For this purpose, they are now turning to tradition, the third of Weber’s ideal-type legitimations. Traditional legitimation in its pre-modern forms meant rule according to established procedures and ancient forms. In most cases this meant Patrimonial monarchical rule with rules of succession based on hereditary principles, such as primogeniture, or election among the members of a royal family, or victory in a battle for succession fought between eligible contenders or powerful outsiders. It was frequently a case of the king is dead, long live the king. Frequently, too, the priests were there to lend their blessing, by some kind of anointment or coronation ceremony. The people were not consulted in any way, but they duly acquiesced and obeyed provided the ruler acceded by right of tradition. The ruler who did not have such traditional sanctions behind him was considered

an illegitimate power holder or at worse a tyrant who could only rule by force of arms; always a very insecure form of ruling, for, as Napoleon said, one can do anything with bayonets except sit on them. Hence, the effort rulers exert, no matter how they came to power in the first place, to acquire legitimacy.

This is not less true at present than it was in the past. The rulers of capitalist despotism regimes are no less intent on shoring up their authority by recovering or reinventing traditional forms of legitimation than were their ancient precursors. Xi Jinping casts himself in the traditional role of a beneficent emperor and Putin adopts some of the trappings of a Czar. They call on traditional religious beliefs to uphold their positions. In China, Confucian norms of deference to superiors are being invoked, and all other religious beliefs are tolerated provided they oblige the faithful to be obedient to the current ruler. In Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church has been enlisted to give its unstinting blessings to the ruler, just as it was wont to do in Czarist times. In Iran's theocracy state and religion have become one, since the traditional ruler, the Shah, has been dethroned. It remains to be seen whether the Shia clerics, the ayatollahs, can perpetuate their own rule, or whether they will be compelled to restore some kind of royal figurehead. In any case, no matter what ensues, legitimacy will be based on tradition. In Turkey, Erdogan does not figure himself as successor to the Caliph, but he, too, claims legitimacy for himself and his Party on traditional grounds as the upholders and saviours of Islam from the ravages of Western secularism.

There are dangerous aspects to this kind of legitimacy, for should the policies of these rulers lead to worsening economic conditions or gross forms of corruption and inequality, then they would be liable to fall back on the old unifying nostrum of aggressive nationalism to solidify their regime. Kaplan points to this possibility in both China and Russia:

Both China and Russia have exerted influence of increasing imperial dimensions, even as they weaken internally from economic stress of a profound and structural kind. The very fragility of these highly centralized, Politburo-style regimes inside their own countries makes them increasingly aggressive beyond their borders since nationalism can serve as a unifying element in times of social stress.¹²

However, thus far there has been little evidence of any such economic or social stress in either China or Russia. But even if there are strains these might prove

¹² Ibid, 33.

to be of a temporary and passing kind, rather than the profound and structural kind that Kaplan envisages. There is no evidence of the latter in either China or Russia. Xi Jinping's Belt and Road initiative, establishing close cooperation with Russia is meant to head off the possibility of any such downturn in either country. This policy might well succeed; but if it were to fail then there would be real problems for these regimes.

If such problems did arise, as Kaplan argues, this could lead to "future palace coups and intrigues in Beijing and Moscow, [which] could trigger fires throughout the Eastern hemisphere" as "China and Russia are the hinge states on which the organization of this entire conflict system depends, given the constricted and copious interactions from one end of the supercontinent to the other ..."¹³ This is what the current rulers wish to secure themselves against by turning to tradition. If Xi Jinping can assume the status of a secular emperor in China then this will make him proof against the vagaries of the economy or even foreign policy by holding the traditional mandate of heaven. Only a near total collapse would show him unfit to rule. Something similar holds for Putin in Russia, and for the ayatollahs in Iran; and Erdogan is also aiming for some such fail-proof position in Turkey.

In all these countries, the present rulers have a rich trove of tradition and history to draw on. This is in fact what they are doing in reminding their subjects of their heritage from a glorious imperial past through all the means at their disposal; propaganda in the media, rewriting history, new educational syllabuses, sacred sites, archaeological discoveries and so on. No technique of aggrandizement is left unused. All critiques that cast a negative light on the past are suppressed. As far as it is at all historically plausible, the present regimes identify themselves with those of the past.

3 Leviathan versus Behemoth

In order to understand how these traditionalist revivals operate, and what traditional sentiments they draw on, we must turn to the history of the ancient civilizations on which they are based. These civilizations are now defunct, but they have left indelible marks on present societies in the form of historical memories of an imperial past, customs, religions and cultural attitudes, as well as cultural practices in the form of art, myth, folk lore, and countless

¹³ Max Weber, *On Law in Economy and Society*, ed. and trans. Max Rheinstein and trans. Edward A. Shils (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 213.

other local factors. Ingrained in the social memories and memorials are the events surrounding the imperial regimes of those earlier times, now frequently handed down as stories and histories which still have a powerful hold on the people, especially on the less educated ones.

The old regimes of the four great Asian empires have ever since the eighteenth century received the designation of Oriental Despotism. This was by no means a derogatory term at that time when the Enlightenment *philosophes* were appealing for benevolent despots in Europe and pointing to the Chinese emperors and their system of mandarin administrators selected through examinations, rather than through sale of offices, as examples to be followed by their own bureaucracies. However, no matter how despotic these Western benevolent despots proved to be in practice, as was clearly the case with the two leading ones, Frederick of Prussia and Catherine of Russia, their rule still differed from those of the Eastern despots. In the West a rule of law obtained which was absent in the East, which does not mean that there was no law in the East, only that the nature of law and the attitude to law was very different in these two civilizational spheres. These differences are still evident at present as the Eastern approach to law has been inherited by the current capitalist despotism regimes in Eurasia. We must, therefore, devote some attention to law as this marks a fundamental divergence that still separates East from West at present.

According to Weber, the Eastern approach to law is based on what he calls “khadi justice”, a substantively rational mode of adjudication, whereas the Western approach is based on formal legality, a formally rational mode. According to Max Rheinstein, the editor of Weber’s work on law, “Khadi justice [is] used by Weber as a term ... to describe the administration of justice which is oriented not to fixed rules of a formally rational law but to the ethical, religious, political or otherwise experiential postulates of a substantively rational law.”¹⁴ Thus when Weber states that “in khadi justice” there are no “rational” bases of judgement at all, he is using the term “rational” in a purely formal sense. In a contemporary context it is politics and ideology that constitute the substantively rational basis of khadi justice.

This is particularly true of Muslim societies from which the term originates, but no less so of contemporary Chinese legal practices. For though Chinese law is cast in a Western-style formalistic manner, its adjudication is far closer to khadi justice than to Western legal procedure. This is so because an independent judiciary does not exist since there is no formal separation

14 Ibid, 351.

between legislative, administrative and judicial functions, the Party rules overall and the leader over the Party, as is the practice in despotic capitalism. This approach to law is itself in part a survival from the patrimonial nature of Oriental Despotism. As we outlined previously, Patrimonialism is a term coined by Weber to refer to a form of rule where the ruler considers the whole of his dominion to be his own personal property and treats the people as his household, to serve him in whatever role is allotted to them at his personal discretion. He can grant estates to his retainers or just as easily deprive them of all their possessions. And the same applies to law, which can be made or unmade at his will, as Zhengyuan Fu writes:

The Chinese imperial legal tradition was from its very inception dominated by the autocratic principle of the legalists. The emperor, as the embodiment of the highest legal authority, was above and beyond the law. All legislative, judicial and executive powers were concentrated in his hands. The emperor was the sole law giver, and he alone could make or disclaim any law arbitrarily. He was also the supreme judge whose decision was the ultimate court ruling; in fact, his ruling could override the existing law. He could at will create, change, override, abolish, suspend and interpret the law.¹⁵

It was not only Mao who took the law into his own hands in this way as a personal prerogative. This is the doctrine inherent in Communist Party rule in China from start to finish. However, since Deng Xiaoping, some show was made to enact Western notions of law and judicial independence, but this was done mainly to assure Western investors. Since then, and particularly since Xi Jinping came to power, there has been a steady process of eroding whatever legal rights were provisionally granted to citizens or whatever independence was exercised by judges or lawyers. Thus, what we mean by “rule of Law” in the Western sense does not exist in China, as Clive Hamilton and Marieke Ohlberg declare:

It cannot be stressed enough that there is no rule of law in China. What the country has is rule by law; that is the use of law as an instrument to govern. The Party is quite clear about that: it's the Party that decides

15 Zhengyuan Fu, *Autocratic Tradition and Chinese politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 119.

on the laws, and the interests of the Party trump all interests that are in conflict with it.¹⁶

Now it can be more or less assumed that in any serious case whoever is arrested will be pronounced guilty and usually forced to confess to the alleged crime. Lawyers arguing human rights cases have been disbarred. Now that Xi Jinping has declared himself tantamount to ruler for life, his position as “emperor” has been consolidated; and, so, too, has his sway over the law in the name of the Party. It is only his circumspection and continuing need to exercise discretion in relation to the Westerners that inhibits him from exercising his full legal powers in the old imperial way.

Whether a Chinese version of “khadi justice” can be made compatible with capitalism in any shape or form is the historical experiment being played out in China at present. In the West capitalism could only function on the basis of a rule of law safeguarding property, profits, commercial contracts and every other consideration that governs market transactions and investments. It is a system of rights and regulations that has been gradually built up largely on the basis of Roman law, which first specified the conditions governing contractual arrangements. To these were added over the centuries all the other legal provisions – banking law, company law, labour law, and many more – that make capitalism workable. Where these are absent, as under Oriental Despotism, then capitalism can obviously not exist.

The interesting case is that of China at present where Socialism has not been reinstated but the legal requirements necessary for capitalism to function are being gradually whittled away. This is what is officially called “Socialism with Chinese characteristics.” As we know, Socialism whether under Stalin in Russia or Mao in China, proved economically disastrous, because such a command economy can work in war time or periods of emergency, but it cannot be successfully sustained as the normal form of economic life. Its shortcomings have been made clearly evident by what ensued in Russia after Stalin and by the fact that in China Deng Xiaoping turned gradually to capitalism after Mao. What then arose, and proved highly successful under Deng and his successors was in fact “Capitalism with Chinese characteristics”. It was generally assumed in the West that the system would evolve into a full and proper capitalism and that Chinese law would be transformed accordingly into a Western type rational-legal system. It was on this assumption of a rule of law that Westerners were

16 Clive Hamilton and Marieke Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand: Exposing How the Chinese Communist Party is Reshaping the World*, (Melbourne: Hardie Grant, 2020), 96.

prepared to invest in China and companies to operate there, even without political democracy.

However, if the steps made towards this kind of rule of law are now being rescinded in line with khadi justice, then any Western commercial engagement with China will eventually cease, and the Chinese economy will have to proceed on its own. This is bound to have internal repercussions among capitalists in China itself. Will entrepreneurs be willing to risk their capital on the uncertain prospects of being able to export their products to the West or being able to retain the control and ownership of their companies in China itself? If the entrepreneurial spirit in China falters, then it is likely that the Chinese economy will become stagnant and high levels of growth will cease. China will be caught in what is known among economists as the “middle income trap.” There might be a way out of this, but so far none is clearly in sight except for the Belt and Road initiative launched by Xi Jinping.

The Belt and Road initiative is designed to create a sphere of Chinese economic influence which will in time rival that of the West. If successful it will mean that China will secure its basic needs for raw materials, fuel and food, free of the threat of boycotts and at the same time find markets for its products and excess building capacities. In other words, it would re-establish something like the old tribute arrangements that the Chinese emperors exercised over the countries surrounding the South China Sea and other adjacent territories, but on a far larger scale. But would that be enough to give China the technological advantage it needs to surpass that of America? For as long as it is technologically inferior it is bound to remain politically inferior as well. We cannot predict the answer to this question.

There is, however, a political dimension to the Belt and Road project as well. It follows the old Mongol Silk Road route that Marco Polo traversed in the thirteenth century, setting off from Venice across the Eurasian heartland to Beijing; and coming back from Beijing to Venice along the alternative sea passage through the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. This is a bold and daring foreign policy *démarche* that openly reveals China's global ambition to challenge America. It relies on those countries where American influence is at its weakest, Russia and Iran, and includes Turkey where it is weakening. This matches historically the Eurasian extent of the Mongol empires under Kublai Khan whom Marco Polo served. It does not include those areas where their conquering expeditions failed, principally Japan, Vietnam and Java or what is now Indonesia, which are now also outside the ambit of China's reach.

It is not that China now has any imperialist aims to recreate the Mongol empire or to embark on any overt campaigns of military conquest. Rather

what it aims to achieve under present circumstances is to draw the Eurasian countries into a relation of dependence where China can once again become “the middle kingdom”, exchanging with them gifts in the form of investments and infrastructure projects and in return expecting tribute in the form of profits and allegiances. It aims thereby to set up a new Eurasian bloc that will be independent of the West in every way. But it is still in the early stages of achieving this goal, so it must play along with Western demands, such as conceding something to the economic pressures that America under Trump placed on it, and which Biden is continuing.

Following the disaster of Mao's regime in China, and subsequently the fall of the Soviet Union and of Communism throughout the world, China chose to play a subservient waiting role in relation to America. It abided by Deng Xiaoping's dictum “hide your strength, bide your time”. In this period China became America's and eventually the West's small goods supplier; but with the trading surpluses it accrued, and given America's insatiable need for finance, it also became America's creditor. Under the leaders following Deng Xiaoping China meekly stood aside while America dominated the globe and expended its resources fighting terrorists and dictators in the Middle East. Despite its own problem with Muslims in Xinjiang province, China was happy to see America deal with this menace globally. But slowly and surely, China built up its military strength and its cash reserves and gradually began to assert itself, first in the South China sea and then further afield. Finally, when Xi Jinping became leader, he realized that China did not need to hide its strength any longer, for the power differential had been narrowed, and he decided that the time had come to turn the tables and mount an open challenge to America. Hence, the Belt and Road initiative was announced in 2013, a wide-ranging and a daring plan of great geopolitical significance.

Xi was doubtless encouraged by the fact that so many other major powers were dispensing with American inspired liberal democracy and moving towards a version of capitalist despotism much like that of China. Its close neighbour, Russia under Putin, began to fall out with America and the European Union when NATO was pushing up to Russia's borders, and when the Ukraine began to slip from its grasp, through Western interference, as Putin believed. Iran remained America's sworn enemy. Under Erdogan, Turkey began drifting towards despotism and away from liberal democracy and from America, which he accused of harbouring his enemies. The stage was thus set for a realignment of these four major Eurasian powers. A potential Eurasian league was gradually shaping itself with many lesser states as its satellites.

There are many commonalities of interest working towards the integration of these countries. For China they constitute a land route for its exports

to Europe, one that affords much faster delivery times than by sea and much cheaper cargo costs than by air. For the intermediate participating countries that lie astride this route, it offers infrastructure developments that they could not possibly undertake by themselves; this is particularly so for the Central Asian ex-Soviet republics that are economically backward, as well as for failing states, such as Pakistan and Bangladesh. For China itself the route opens up possibilities of its own hinterland, the hitherto undeveloped and much less industrialized inland provinces, especially the furthestmost ones, Xinjiang, inhabited by Muslim Uyghurs. All in all, something approximating two-thirds of the human population belong to countries that participate in the Belt and Road project.

China and the Eurasian participants in the Belt and Road scheme also gain by developing their own markets and supplies of resources that are totally independent of the West, and therefore free from American sanctions or interference. China is looking for alternative supplies of its need for new materials, energy supplies and food which its large and increasingly more affluent population requires. And the Eurasian powers, especially Russia and Iran, are seeking a market that is not threatened by sanctions; whilst in turn providing markets for Chinese goods. The partners of this growing Eurasian league are almost made for each other, as they were when the Silk Road was operating during the Mongol times.

Similar considerations of securing resources and markets apply to China's other ventures into parts of Asia and Africa. Pakistan, Myanmar and other countries bordering on China provide alternate routes to the world's ocean; control over these routes would forestall any possibility of blockade by the US Navy through the closure of the narrow South East Asian straits. This would also provide an alternative access to Middle East oil on which China still depends. Africa, where China is also very active, provides agricultural development possibilities to lessen China's dependence on Western countries, America, Canada and Australia in particular, for food supplies and raw materials. Thus, China intends to detach itself as far as possible from undue reliance on the West, and this might permit it eventually to isolate itself and its allies from the West if the struggle for global supremacy reaches that point.

Thus, if the Belt and Road initiative were to succeed then this Eurasian axis would once again become the hub of world trade, as it had once been during the Silk Road period when it was first opened up to link the Han Empire and the Roman Empire and later during the Mongol Empire. The Silk Road ceased to matter when America was discovered and the Far East could be reached directly by sea. Gradually world trade at the hands of the intrepid Europeans took to the oceans and the long-distance inland land-routes were abandoned.

It is possible that these might be once more revived thanks to very fast trains and super-highways that the Chinese are building everywhere in the interior of Asia, mostly leading to Europe. This time it might eventuate that America is by-passed if the land-routes prove superior to the sea-routes. The sea will have lost its advantage for communications and trade since the Phoenicians first embarked on it 3000 years ago.

What now ensues is a struggle between Behemoth and Leviathan or the land monster versus the sea monster. We shall refer to the two sides of this contest using the Orwellian terms Eurasia and Oceania. This is a multi-faceted and complex competition, engaged in by two powers that are still in very close interaction with each other; China and America, the two leading protagonists, are still locked together in trade and finance, in science and technology, in education and to some extent in cultural exchanges. Nothing like the old Cold War total hostility is now at work, though it could come to that if the competition turned into overt conflict. But at present this still seems unlikely.

The key to the coming global struggle is undoubtedly Europe, as Clive Hamilton and Marieke Ohlberg put it:

Long seen by the Chinese Communist Party as the largely irrelevant junior partner of the United States, Europe is now viewed as the great prize. By winning over Europe, the CCP hopes to convince the world that China is the 'champion of multilateralism' and a much-needed counterweight to US hegemony and unilateralism. Beijing wants to mobilize European support for its initiative in the developing world.¹⁷

If China does succeed in weaning Europe away from America, then it will have split the West beyond recovery. Its Belt and Road project has that as its ultimate aim for all its routes debouch in Europe at the two strategic points in regions where the EU is at its weakest and most brittle, in Eastern Europe and in the Mediterranean. These are the two hinges on the gateway to Europe and if they were to snap it would leave the door to Europe wide open. The Chinese are already infiltrating into Greece and Italy at one end and into Hungary and Poland at the other. In the latter two countries there has been a decisive turning to a mild form of authoritarianism which makes Chinese inroads all the easier to accommodate, especially as Beijing "presents itself as an alternative

¹⁷ Clive Hamilton and Marieke Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand: Exposing How the Chinese Communist Party is Reshaping the World* (Melbourne: Hardie Grant, 2020), 5.

economic partner to such European countries with economic vulnerabilities and rising Euroscepticism.”¹⁸

Eastern Europe is a weak point because there the ex-Communist countries are not yet securely liberal democratic and are still economically backward. They are also subject to Russian influence and pressure due to long-standing relations stemming from Communist times. This is particularly true of Hungary under Orban, who is the unruliest of all EU members and is inclined to flout its liberal democratic norms. Poland is driving in the same direction under the leadership of the Law and Justice Party, and it, too, is slowly and stealthily moving towards authoritarian forms of rule. However, atavistic fear and loathing of Russia will give it pause from breaking completely with the EU and America. Bulgaria is another East European country where Russia and China are gaining sway; Romania is bound to follow suit for it, too, is very weak economically and internally unstable. Thus, Eastern Europe as a whole is wide open to combined Russian and Chinese intrusion and suasion.

The Mediterranean is the other region where Chinese influence is making itself felt. Whereas once Marco Polo went from Venice to China, it is now the Chinese who are coming in large numbers to Venice, and without them and other tourists Venice would not survive. At its old rival Genoa, where Marco Polo in captivity told his tale, port facilities are being acquired by a Chinese company, and Italy has joined the Belt and Road initiative. In Greece, the Piraeus has already been bought as a stopping-off port for Chinese exports. Right throughout the Mediterranean this pattern of trade and investment will repeat itself in all the economically weak countries, including Spain, Portugal, Egypt and many others, where China is also seeking to secure ownership of port facilities.

Europe as a whole is becoming increasingly economically dependent on exports to China. For example, Daimler, partly Chinese owned, exports more of its luxury brand cars to China than to the rest of Europe and America combined. Germany has become China's largest trading partner; in 2018 it exported €93 billion worth of goods. This makes Germany very dependent on China and exposes it to Chinese pressure for political ends. At the same time, it is seeking to meet its energy needs by importing Russian oil and gas. Whether America will be able to depend on it as a political ally is starting to become doubtful. And the same is true of France, which has always followed an independent foreign policy from de Gaulle onwards. France, too, finds the biggest foreign market for its luxury brand goods in China. Britain, despite its strong pro-China

18 Ibid, 68.

lobby, is bound to remain as always close to America; but post-Brexit it might have to look to China if its economic prospects are to improve. The Chinese will make this conditional on a certain degree of compliance, for China uses trade to obtain influence and other political advantages, as Hamilton and Ohlberg show.

Europe is not an altogether secure partner for America for anti-American feelings of resentment are simmering just below the surface in many sectors of the European population, including Britain. The huge protest demonstrations against the Iraq war showed how easily such sentiments could be aroused to give rise to anti-American action. What motivated them was not so much love of Saddam Hussein as hatred for President Bush. France's stand in the UN in blocking international legitimation of the invasion of Iraq revealed that anti-American Gaullist tendencies were still very much alive and that Chirac shared them. The blame and obloquy heaped on Blair for supporting Bush within his own Labour Party and the resentment this still arouses was clearly in evidence during the time of Corbyn's leadership in the Labour Party. In Germany, too, anti-American resentment is coming to the fore on both the Left and Right, as well as among the Greens. Gratitude for American aid and protection of Europe after the Second World War has long since waned and is giving way to resentment of America's display of superior attitudes, especially under President Trump.

Europe might detach itself from the Western alliance and move in the direction of China, resulting in the so-called "Finlandization" of Europe, which was so feared during the Cold War. The more dependent Europe becomes on China, the more likely this is to eventuate. American policy under both Obama and Trump has, if anything, helped to bring this about by the weak response to China's challenge under Obama and by Trump's blustering which furthered isolationist tendencies in America. The Europeans are beginning to sense that America cannot be trusted as an ally. The new Biden administration and subsequent administrations will have to work hard to correct such perceptions.

At present the West embraces not only America and Europe but also all their other liberal democratic partners throughout the globe. In Asia the most important ones are Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, with Vietnam a more distant ally. But it is still not clear where some of the others would stand if there were a showdown with China; of these the most important is India, but Indonesia is also a major country whose stance is uncertain. In the Middle East America has close allies in Israel, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. South America is still largely in America's sphere of influence, though there, too, China is moving in economically at a rapid rate. All in all, it is mainly sea-going littoral countries that

are in alliance with America. Hence the Orwellian term Oceania that we have adopted.

The world seems to be shaping up for a global contest between Oceania and Eurasia, Leviathan and Behemoth. But this will not be an Orwellian protracted war carried out by proxies or a Cold War between the major antagonists. Neither of these possibilities is likely, since the former could lead to all-out war and result in global catastrophe; and the latter is most unlikely due to the interdependence of all the major countries of the world in so many respects, economic, scientific, technological, academic, educational and cultural. The very same Forces of Modernity, namely, capitalism, the State, science and technology, are at work throughout the world, and these can only operate at their most effective on a global cooperative basis. Both America and China benefit most from present arrangements of globalization. They are still entangled in a mutual embrace, which now might be turning to wrestling rather than making love as before, but they are still firmly locked together. Over-ambition and unwise statesmanship could lead them both into the Thucydidean trap, and one can only hope that wiser heads among their leaders will prevail.

In any coming confrontation between Oceania and Eurasia a crucial determinant will be the role of South Asia, namely India. India is a rising superpower, though rising very slowly, but even so it will eventually reach comparable levels with those of the other two superpowers. With which of these will India ally itself? Will it join Oceania as a liberal democracy or Eurasia as a traditional Oriental culture? It could go either way, though at present proximity to China makes it edge ever closer to America. Perhaps a glimpse into India's history will provide a sounder basis for an answer to this question.

India is based on an ancient Hindu civilization now largely defunct. Through its numerous Muslim conquerors, it was drawn into much of the culture and history of the rest of Muslim Asia. First the Arabs conquered the Indus River region and converted it into the Muslim area that has now become Pakistan. Then various Turkic people from Central Asia established sultanates across the Ganges River region. And eventually one of these, the Mughals established an empire by successively occupying nearly all of India in stages. This is a legacy that the present Indian Government wishes mostly to forget and to erase. Instead, it speaks of a colonial period that only began with the British East India Company in the eighteenth century and culminated with the British Empire in India in the nineteenth century, whereas in reality it has been colonized for much longer, as numerous conquerors ruled it.

The British colonialists endowed India with its major institutions, economic, administrative and cultural, as well as its liberal democracy. In that respect India belongs firmly with the West. Even its Socialism, espoused by Nehru

and the Congress Party, was of the Fabian rather than the Soviet variety, even though in the first period after independence India allied itself with the Soviet Union rather than America. After the fall of Communism India reversed course and also liberated itself from the shackles of a Socialist planned economy.

There is, thus, good reason for supposing India will remain liberal democratic and will side with the Oceanic powers against the Eurasian ones. But there are also grounds for fearing the possibility that it might return to its Asian roots and embark on its own version of despotic capitalism. Modi and the BJP have embarked on a Hindutva project which might be designed to keep them permanently in power. If this were to happen, then India might find that it has more in common with Eurasia than with Oceania. The integration of the Indian economy with that of China, at present still resisted, would lead it in the same direction.

Japan is much more firmly anchored in the Oceanic axis, despite its Asian past. It was one of the few countries in Asia to be spared the Mongol conquest, Vietnam was another, so it did not experience a Mongol-style Oriental Despotism. The Tokugawa shogunate had more of a feudal character which paralleled in some ways European feudalism. This meant that it was easier for it to Westernize than for China or for most other Asian powers. From start to finish of this process Japan had close relations to America, both in peace and in war. It is thus most likely that it will maintain these ties for the foreseeable future.

Indonesia is another country that the Mongols sought to conquer and failed. Eventually the island archipelago was taken over by the Dutch colonialists and unified into the country that became Indonesia. Under its first president Sukarno, Indonesia adopted a hostile stance to the West, but that changed abruptly under Suharto. Since then, Indonesia has played a constructive role in furthering the ASEAN group of states. It is now subject to China's economic inroads as part of the whole region that is so crucial to China's sea-going trade, being the route of the Belt and Road project. These peaceful incursions are matched by military ones into the South China sea. How Indonesia will react to this double pressure is still uncertain.

Indonesia is also a Muslim country that has much in common with its close neighbour Malaysia and the rest of the Islamic world. It therefore also suffers from the fanatical terrorism to which the whole Muslim ecumene is now subject. This is in no sense a revival of Islamic civilization, as Huntington assumed. It is much more a deeply reactionary, religiously motivated grab for power such as succeeded in Iran and now in Afghanistan. Elsewhere it has generally failed. Muslim civilization is beyond recall. It was first shattered by the Mongols when they devastated Baghdad and brought the Abbasid Caliphate to

an end. Subsequent occupation by the Ilkhans and then the Timurids continued the process of destruction. Neither the Ottomans nor the Safavids could bring about real recovery of Islamic civilizations though they restored some of its former glory.

Their two modern successor regimes, Turkey and Iran, though subject to religious rivalries, are making common cause with China and Russia against the West. Both are crucial for the Belt part of the Belt and Road project and so are being assiduously wooed by China. Turkey, though still a member of NATO, is responding positively to these overtures. As early as 2013 Erdogan declared in a television interview that joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization consisting of China, Russia and the Central Asian republics is his preferred option because “it is better and more powerful and we have values in common”.¹⁹ The values in common are clearly related to despotic capitalism rather than any Turkish commonality with Central Asia or the Uighurs in China.

The battle lines seem to be drawn as the rivalry between Eurasia and Oceania becomes more intense and is likely to run for the rest of this century. Superficially it seems to be once more a reprise of the age-old competition between land power and sea power, or Behemoth and Leviathan in biblical terms. Hence, as Kaplan intimates, the old theories of Mahan and Mackinder are once more in vogue.²⁰ America, a naval power, has control of the oceans and seas and has allies right across the shores of all the continents. China, a military power, is establishing control of the heartland of Eurasia.

However, what is happening now is no longer the old-style military confrontation between two distinct and separate warring powers as in the past. In a globalized world there is now a much greater level of interdependence, so that a resolution of differences using purely military means is no longer possible. But it is precisely this interpretation that opens up avenues for other forms of competition and rivalry. A much greater role is now played by ideology and cultural subversion; soft power is now of equal importance to hard power. The West had assumed that with the fall of Communism in Russia and China’s move to capitalism they would follow a steady course to liberal democracy. But that did not turn out to be the case for, among other reasons, there are deep-seated historical precedents and predispositions.

Instead, what has ensued and become gradually apparent since the accession of Putin and Xi Jinping is that the West finds itself on the defensive, under

19 Quoted in Peter Frankopan, *op. cit.*, 520.

20 Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783* (New York: Little, Brown and Co. 1890). Halford. J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (Washington DC: National Defence University Press, 1942).

attack by these two despotic capitalist regimes. Putin intervened in a crude and obvious manner in the two crucial voting campaigns for Trump in the US and for Brexit in Britain. But Xi has proceeded in a much more subtle and cunning way in attempting to sway the West, through cultivating friendships and currying favour mixed with threats. The threat to deny trade is the most potent in the Chinese arsenal of weapons of intimidation. At the same time there has been a gradual infiltration into Western institutions of all kinds by Chinese agents of influence and carefully cultivated stooges. A considerable number of these now depend on compliance with Chinese demands, which are at present not too onerous; hence the readiness of friends of China in the West to urge accommodation and not disturb relations that are so advantageous to themselves. The book by Hamilton and Ohlberg exposes the multiple ways in which the Chinese state apparatus has succeeded in making inroads into the vital institutions of the West.

In a sense, this is a battle for hearts and minds on the largest possible scale. The aim of the Eurasian powers is to dishearten and discomfit the Westerners, to make them doubt and despair of their values, institutions and ultimately themselves. In the first place, it is intended to foster the belief that despotic capitalist systems are the equal if not better than liberal democratic ones. In the second place, it is designed to convince the West that Oceania represents the past and that the future belongs to Eurasia. Hence the confident assertions made by the Chinese and those arguing on their behalf to the effect that China will overtake and surpass America in every respect that matters. They operate on the adage that to persuade one's opponent that the battle is lost is halfway to winning the war.

In refuting such views, one must not overlook the fact that there are undoubted advantages that a capitalist despotic system has over a liberal democratic one. Some of these superior features were already obvious to many thinkers throughout the history of Oriental and Occidental forms of government. Machiavelli was aware that the Ottoman Sultan had a far surer grip on power and larger sway and scope for decision and action than the King of France, and he thought this to be an advantage.²¹ For these reasons, Eastern rule of undivided and unbridled despotism seemed superior to Western forms of divided and qualified power.

To understand what this amounts to and what it really means we need to explore the fundamental differences between Eastern and Western systems of

21 Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince and The Discourses*, ed. Max Lerner (New York: The Modern Library, 1980), 15.

politics and the values on which they are based. We have already briefly adumbrated Oriental Despotism and the values of obedience to authority on which it operates and we will next go on to study the basic values of Western politics from its very different inception in the Greek polis. It is from this source that most of our Western political vocabulary derives, such as the classic notions of aristocracy, democracy, tyranny and others, even though very different forms of rule came later to prevail from the Roman Empire onwards. But from the Greek polis down to the French Revolution at the start of modern politics the values that frequently came to the fore were variants of liberty, equality and fraternity which have no equivalents in the East. And this is still the case at present.

PART 2

Politics



Introduction to Part 2

The political catastrophe that engulfed Europe in the twentieth century, in the form of wars, civil wars and revolutions, involved battles of ideologies and ideas that went back to the French Revolution, at the very start of modern politics. These battles were already prevalent in the nineteenth century as the struggles between liberal democrats, socialists and nationalists played themselves out. But they did not become as ferocious and destructive as they would after the First World War and its aftermath during most of the twentieth century. For it was then that extremist tendencies in these ideological contexts prevailed, and led to liberal democratic capitalism, to Bolshevik socialism and to Fascist and Nazi nationalism. These three proceeded to enter into an ideological battle to the death that ravaged Europe along with much of Asia.

Nothing like this outcome was in the offing or could conceivably have been expected during the nineteenth century when the three dominant ideological movements arose, following the end of the Napoleonic wars and the failed Metternichian attempt to restore the *Ancien Regime* in France and elsewhere in Europe. During this repressive political climate, liberal democrats fought for universal suffrage, socialists fought for social justice, and nationalists for national self-determination. The latter were particularly active in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe where the unification of Germany and Italy was at stake and the independence of Greece, Poland and Hungary from the Ottoman, Czarist and Habsburg empires was being violently contested. Socialism at this stage was still in its infancy, though the workers had already made a political showing during the June days of the 1848 Revolution in France. But gradually their numbers grew during the course of the nineteenth century in most of the countries of Europe, so by the end of the century socialism had developed into a major political force to challenge liberalism and nationalism.

Each of these three movements arose out of ideas that emerged during the course of the French Revolution. Each took up one of the three key terms of the revolutionary slogan: liberty, equality, fraternity and emphasized it at the expense of the other two. For the liberal democrats it was liberty that took priority, and by that they meant primarily the freedoms and rights of the individual, particularly market freedom in line with *laissez-faire* capitalism. For the socialists what mattered most was equality, and their main aim was to overcome class differences as these arose out of the disparities of wealth due to the unequal distribution of private property. For the nationalists, fraternity was uppermost, and by this they understood the brotherhood of all the sons of the fatherland as determined by their shared language, culture, historical

memories, and some also insisted on common blood descent or race as essential. In emphasizing one of the triad of values as crucial, each of these ideological movements did not turn its back completely on the other two, but each interpreted these in terms of their primary goal. This is what made considerable collaboration between them possible, at least during the peaceful epoch of the nineteenth century down to the First World War.

Hence, during the course of the nineteenth century there were continuing tactical alliances between leaders and parties representing the three ideological movements that stood on opposite sides in a triangular contest. Some of these marriages of convenience seem bizarre to us now, going by twentieth century assumptions. But at that stage they were not as far apart as they were subsequently to become. Thus, for example, during the 1848 revolution in France, the liberal bourgeoisie sided with the nationalist Bonapartists and voted for Louis Bonaparte for president, much to Marx's astonishment.¹ He was equally disconcerted, when in the newly unified German Reich, the leader of his own Social Democratic party, Ferdinand Lassalle, struck a deal with the Iron Chancellor Bismarck. Such apparent incongruities in tactical relations attested to the fact that the three ideological movements gradually learned to live with each other and to adjust to each other, which explains how they came to coexist down to 1914.

As parliamentary democratic government based on wide suffrage became a feature in all European countries – including Russia, though to a much more limited extent – so parties representing all three political movements became prominent in these parliaments. This frequently led to vociferous altercations during debates, which were so disconcerting to the aristocratic conservatives, but it also meant that through political wrangles and manoeuvres these opposed ideologies were assuming complementary roles in relation to each other. In their very opposition they were in fact collaborating. Even the most radical of them, the Marxist Social Democratic party in Germany, had lost its fervour and revolutionary élan and accepted that the workers' demands could be best attained through the ballot box. The fact that socialist parties throughout Europe voted in August 1914 to pass the budgets for war in their respective countries is proof enough of how far they had become integrated.

All that changed after the terrible war, particularly in the internal politics of the losing powers, Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy (it was on the winning side but had lost much both in manpower and territory in the disastrous defeats towards the end). It was in these countries that the lurch towards

1 See Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, op. cit.

the extremes which led to internecine wars between the ideologies took place. It began in Russia when the February revolution of 1917 brought a liberal government under Kerensky to power. But within months it was displaced by the October coup d'état when the Bolsheviks under Lenin seized power. This was followed by a vicious civil war between the Reds and Whites, the latter alliance between nationalist and monarchist forces. The Bolsheviks won and formed the first totalitarian regime in Europe.

Elsewhere in Europe, following attempts at Bolshevik inspired uprisings, the extreme nationalists reacted in a similar way. In Italy an extreme form of nationalism, calling itself Fascism, led by Mussolini usurped the liberal government with the connivance of the monarchy, Church and army, which were responding to bourgeois fears of Red revolution. In Hungary and Austria there were Bolshevik attempts to seize power which were rapidly defeated by nationalist forces. This also occurred in Germany, except that there an elected Social Democratic government put down the Bolshevik Spartacist revolt. Liberal democratic government ensued for the duration of the Weimar Republic, until Hitler was voted into power.

From then on, the die was cast for a major war in Europe between the countries governed according to the three ideological tendencies: the liberal democratic, the extreme nationalist and the extreme socialist. What had been a kind of cohabitation up to the First World War became a deadly confrontation after it. In the approach to war the three major parties changed sides in a game of musical chairs. At first the West European democracies condoned and appeased Hitler and the Nazis as a bulwark against Stalin and the Communists. Then Hitler and Stalin entered into a pact against the democracies led by Britain and France. Then with the defeat of France and Hitler's attack on Russia, Churchill and Stalin came to terms, soon to be joined by Roosevelt when America entered the war. Once Hitler was beaten a new battle called the Cold War began between the two victorious partners, principally America and Russia.

After the war America assumed pre-eminence over a devastated Western Europe, which could only rebuild itself with help. Hence, it was its version of liberal democracy as untrammelled free market capitalism that displaced the more welfare-state oriented governments of the social democratic parties that had come to rule many of the European countries immediately after the war. America, in accordance with its founding principles, stressed liberty above equality and knew nothing of socialism or of fraternity in its European form as nationalism, except for its own version as exceptionalism and manifest destiny. And even though the Preamble to the Constitution declares that "all men are created equal" the main emphasis falls on the next sentence: "and endowed

by their Creator with the inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness", which is a euphemism for the Lockian life, liberty and property.

Thus, from its very foundation American democracy was premised on liberalism and unrestrained capitalism. Equality simply meant equality before the law and equality of opportunity, and even that was impossible to attain for blacks in view of the peculiar institution of slavery in the Southern states till the Civil War, and segregation after it till the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. For whites there was equality of opportunity, but in a purely formal sense that access to elected office was open for everyone and all had an equal chance to succeed on the open market. And, indeed, there were opportunities for all, though the rags to riches myth was only true for select individuals. Apart from that, a kind of rough and ready frontiersman spirit of camaraderie, free of class distinction prevailed in America even long after the frontier had closed. Otherwise, every other type of inequality was tolerated and accepted in America, such as privileged access to the best education for the rich and those from establishment families. It is true that during the prosperous period after the Second World War the degree of inequality of wealth lessened; but since the liberalization of market policies in the 1980s it has widened again and now stands at what it had been before the First World War.

Due to this prevailing American liberal ideology neither a European-style socialism nor any kind of nationalist conservatism had any chance of attracting a following in America; except perhaps briefly and fitfully among the Northern Progressivist or the Southern Agrarians respectively, neither of which succeeded in establishing itself. The reason for this lies in the totally different social structure of America as compared to Europe, for there was no established class hierarchy based on an order of estates. As industrialization grew, there did develop a proletariat of workers, but these were not keen to engage in class conflict. They went on strike only to improve their working conditions and raise their wages, namely, they engaged in trade union battles with the capitalist owners, whom they had no intention of usurping or expropriating. Hence the two-party system of Democrats and Republicans, the successors to the original Whigs and Tories, prevailed and continues till this day. Both promoted variants of liberal democratic capitalism, for there was no other political ideology at play.

After the Second World War and the devastation of Europe, it seemed as if America was the sole surviving refuge of Western civilization. Many hoped that the torch of freedom and culture would be passed on across the Atlantic, especially in view of the large numbers of illustrious refugees who carried their European learning and cultivation with them to this new land dedicated to democracy. And for a short while it seemed that this would indeed come to

pass; but by now it is amply apparent that it has not quite turned out as might have been hoped. In this work it will be our primary task to establish what has gone right and what has gone wrong with America, the last great hope of Western civilization.

What has gone right is easy to specify. America has been an exemplary triumph for the Forces of Modernity. American capitalism has been an extraordinary economic success and surpasses that of any other country. The conditions for that achievement were very propitious in America, a sparsely populated continent with all conceivable natural resources. Given Yankee entrepreneurial ingenuity, a product of its Protestant background, the pioneering spirit of its frontiersmen, and an unlimited supply of labour power from the migrant masses of Europe – all the conditions were there for every kind of capitalistic development in agriculture and industry. American capitalism took off after the Civil War and except occasionally, as during the Great Depression, has not faltered since; though it has repeatedly changed its character, and now mostly functions on a global scale through its multinational corporations, media industries and financial investments.

American government has been highly conducive to capitalist development, and is itself a remarkable institution. From its origin it was a model constitutional arrangement that preceded any in Europe. It embodies a combination of division of powers and separation of powers: division between state and federal authorities with their different jurisdictions and responsibilities, and a separation at every level between legislative, executive and judicial functions. This prevents any concentration of power in any one institution as a system of checks and balances operates. America has never been threatened with dictatorship, and most probably never will be, and even though oligarchic tendencies have eaten into and corrupted its democracy, nevertheless, at the highest level it is still responsive to the popular will, as the election of Obama to the presidency demonstrated.

As for science and technology in America, that story is much more complicated. Ever since Benjamin Franklin, Americans have been active in both domains. However, in the nineteenth century their technical inventiveness far surpassed their scientific achievement. Science was then backward in America because it depended on the universities which were mainly teaching colleges not geared to scientific research. This only began to change towards the end of the nineteenth century when the American elite universities, starting with Johns Hopkins, developed doctoral research programs in science modelled on the best German universities. Since that point, science in America has advanced by leaps and bounds in close cooperation with European developments. Thanks to Hitler's gift of so many of the most outstanding European

scientists, America emerged after the Second World War as the pre-eminent scientific power, a position it has held ever since, at least judging by the award of Nobel Prizes.

Technology has always been America's forte thanks to the encouragement it received from an ever-growing market, from industrial production, and from the infrastructure developments required to tame a newly settled continent. The American patenting system and its intellectual property safeguards have meant that inventors could set themselves up as entrepreneurs and reap the full benefit of their ingenuity. This became particularly important when whole new industries were being set up towards the end of the nineteenth century, such as the electrical, automobile and aeronautical enterprises, food processing plants and mass production in general. The battles over patents between Edison and Tesla and subsequently between the Edison and Westinghouse electricity conglomerates attest to the keen competition that was so conducive to technological development. Edison's laboratory, a veritable factory for inventions, had no parallel in Europe at the time; and from it flowed a huge range of new devices that revolutionized all kinds of activities above all those in media and entertainment and so made the Cultural Industry possible.

America began to surpass Europe in most respects after the First World War, and after the Second World War it reached its acme, largely because Europe had come to its nadir. America's golden age was the period from the turn of the century till around the late 1960s; since then, it has been declining. Europe has caught up, and now China has risen and is challenging it economically and technologically. Since that period the whole quality and tenor of American social life has been coarsening. As we shall see, inequality of wealth has reached staggering proportions not seen since before the First World War. With such disproportionate differences in wealth come unequal access to quality higher education and constantly declining standards of education at lower levels. The public school system is no longer fulfilling its function and is now graduating masses of students who are uncultured and illiterate in every but the crudest sense.

Illiteracy of a cultural kind is pervading the youth of America, addicted as they have become to their own "youth culture" of drugs, sex and rock-and-roll which started in the 1960s with the so-called sexual revolution and has persisted ever since. At the same time, the mass media and its allied advertising industry have had a devastating effect on quality standards in all cultural respects. This has been further amplified with the arrival of information technology and its social media and other communication devices. America is now beginning to approach the kind of society that Aldous Huxley prophetically anticipated during the 1930s, when he wrote his dystopian masterpiece *Brave New World*.

It is the kind of society, now become universal, that Jean Chesneaux depicts in his book with the title *Brave Modern World*.²

What this kind of society amounts to will be the subject of our analysis and critique in the subsequent parts of this book. However, in the next two chapters we shall not be much concerned with America, only with Europe. We return to the French Revolutionary triad of liberty, equality, fraternity, and concentrate on equality in the next chapter and fraternity in the one after that. Our main aim is to show how and why the pursuit of equality and fraternity, namely, Socialism and Nationalism, proved so culturally rewarding in the nineteenth century but had such devastating consequences in the twentieth century after the First World War. For this was when Socialism took the extreme form of Bolshevism, and Nationalism morphed into Fascism and Nazism. The clash between them that then ensued sealed the fate of Europe and along with it that of Western civilization in general, for America could not carry the civilizational burden alone.

² Jean Chesneaux, *Brave Modern World: The Prospects for Survival*, trans. Deana Johnstone, Karen Bowie and Francesca Garvie (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992).

Egalitarianism and Socialism

1 An Outline of Western Republican Politics

Liberty, equality and fraternity were by no means ideas originating with the French Revolution. Understood in a general sense they were the principles of republican politics as this originated in the West at the very start with the Greek polis. It is to be found nowhere else in the world, and only prevailed during certain periods or select localities in the West itself, where monarchical rule was lacking or had severely weakened, and this generally was not the case till after the French Revolution. In Asia and elsewhere it was completely unknown, and neither liberty, nor equality nor fraternity were known or even understood. On the contrary, the opposite principles predominated, those consonant with extreme social hierarchies of castes, or class and status differentials, or feudal estates akin to those in medieval Europe. The resultant regimes, more frequently Oriental Despotisms, were illiberal, nonegalitarian and recognized no fraternal commonalities in the social sense, even when religions such as Islam preached the brotherhood and equality of believers before God. The Greeks, the early Romans and later Europeans were the rare exceptions to these kinds of politics of Patrimonialism in the history of world politics.

Even though to the ancient Greeks and Romans liberty, equality and fraternity did not mean quite the same as for the French revolutionaries, they did have closely allied notions. Liberty meant *eleutheria* and referred to the polis or city as a whole; it stood for its independence and autonomy, and thereby its freedom from internal tyranny or external hegemony. Only in Athens did it also mean the freedom to lead one's life as one saw fit, at least according to Pericles' funeral oration. Equality meant *isonomia*, the equality of all citizens before the law and the supremacy of the law above the dictates of rulers or the religious precepts of priests. Only very rarely did it lead to any demands for the equality of wealth, at most for relief from debt; in other words, Socialism was practically unknown in the ancient world, except in Sparta just before its demise. Fraternity meant kinship in a literal sense, as in the polis citizenship was originally granted solely on the basis of blood descent. Only much later, in its Roman form, was it extended as a legal status to those outsiders who qualified. Such a notion of fraternity was also invoked in the medieval city, where it was based on a civic oath or *conjuratio*. As Weber puts it, "more than anything else the fully developed ancient and medieval city was formed and interpreted

as a fraternal association.”¹ Hence, according to Weber, fraternization was the key to the formation of the city as a political community.

Fraternity came to be interpreted as what was later called patriotism and what we now call nationalism. But from the start it meant that the lives of the citizens belonged to the polis and later to the *patria*, as in the adage “*dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*”. Thus, republican politics was premised on emotional bonds of love of one’s city, later one’s country, and a willingness to give one’s life for it. This was usually taken to entail the right to participate in its affairs, that is, in managing the *res publica*. For already from the start, citizenship in a polis, as Aristotle defined it, meant at once to rule and be ruled in turn.

Thus, Egalitarianism, in the sense of an equal right to participate in affairs of state, was also a fundamental notion of Western politics that can be traced back to its earliest stages. It is to be found only very rarely outside the West, and only in a primitive form where consultative assemblies existed.² In the Greek polis these were present from the earliest times; for even when kings ruled, there was already an *ecclesia* or assembly of elders to act as a countervailing body whose advice had to be sought by the king, as Homer in the *Odyssey* describes the politics among the Phaeacians. When such assemblies were constituted by the citizen army of hoplites fighting as equals in a dense phalanx, and no longer as elite heroic warriors, then a high degree of equality was bound to prevail between them. In times, as first in Athens, the assembly of citizens took total power into its own hands and dispensed with kings or other traditional rulers such as priests or judges who prevailed in the Orient and against which the Greeks defined their own politics.

The Greeks found no way of unifying cities; the federation schemes they tried did not work, but the Roman way did manage to achieve this in a very different form. The Roman Republic was a unique variant of the Greek polis, for it accepted as equal fraternal partners the citizens of other cities, and eventually granted them full citizenship as Romans. This was constitutionally impossible for Athens or any other Greek polis with imperial ambitions. The other unique feature of the Roman constitution is that it perfected a form of government that the Greek historian Polybius called a mixed polity. It combined the three classical forms of government, the rule of the one, the few and the many into the one compound form where the Consuls, the Senate and the *comitia centuriata* fulfilled each of these functions. This, of course, is a vast simplification of the complexities of the Roman constitution, but it constituted an

1 Max Weber, *The City*, trans. Don Martindale and Gertrud Neuwirth (New York: The Free Press, 1958), 96.

2 See John Keane, *The Life and Death of Democracy* (New York: Norton, 2009), 104–126.

enormous precedent. Together with the federalist principle, many centuries later it became the basis for the mixed government of the Constitution of the United States; which in turn has become the model for most republican states since then. However, it was the French Revolution which first enshrined the republican idea of politics based on the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity and broke with nearly two millennia of imperial and monarchical rule based on the very opposite principles of authority and hierarchy.

The main historical staging posts between these transitions between Athens and Paris were republican Rome, republican Florence, semi-republican Amsterdam, London (during the period of Civil War and the Commonwealth) and finally Philadelphia (where the US Constitution was formulated) before arriving in republican Paris. These places and their times were like oases of freedom in a long historical desert of empires and monarchies which sought to extinguish the republican spirit and any variant of the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. Nevertheless, these ideas survived and eventually prevailed. There has been much historical and political theoretical writing on how these ideas were passed on from one age to another. One might, among others refer to the work of the political historians John Pocock, Quentin Skinner and more recently Jonathan Israel.³

The key to the preservation of the republican tradition in Western politics was the role of the city from the Greek polis onwards, as we have already presented this in Chapter 1. Cities continued to be autonomous, self-managing entities even when they had lost all political independence, as Weber's work shows.⁴ The basis for this was laid already in the Roman Empire, for the cities were left to manage internal affairs themselves, as long as they paid their taxes and instituted emperor worship and a few other such ceremonial things. Even when the empire fell and the cities became depopulated and desolate, some of these traditions of civic life were retained and maintained. Later with the new burgeoning of cities in the early medieval period the demands for autonomy and freedom from overlordship of either king or bishop became ever more insistent all over Europe. In Northern Italy it led to the complete independence of the city communes; in the rest of Europe north of the Alps only partial independence was attained by so-called free cities, but these rarely became autonomous city-states, such as some of the Italian cities.

3 J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). For a critique of Pocock and Skinner see Jonathan I. Israel, *The Enlightenment that Failed, Ideas, Revolution and Democratic Defeat 1747–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), chap. 2.

4 Max Weber, *The City*, op. cit.

The leading exemplar of such a city-state was Florence, for there many of the traditions of republican government were revived. This was achieved in the course of a struggle between the various factions which came to be known as Guelfs and Ghibellines; and later between the city commune and the wealthy mercantile families; until eventually one of these, the Medici, came out on top and managed to seize power as Dukes of Tuscany. But while the battle lasted, humanist intellectuals once more revived the ancient republican writings on politics. A key late instance of this was Machiavelli, who based himself on Livy and other Roman historians writing on the Roman Republic.⁵

However, it was during Machiavelli's time that a territorial consolidation began in European politics outside Italy that we previously described in Chapter 1 as the establishment of Absolutist Monarchy; and it was this development that laid the foundations for the modern State. It occurred not among the Italian city-states, but among the new all-powerful territorial monarchs of the kingdoms of Spain, France, England and the Hapsburg domains. Machiavelli was not aware that the future of the modern state lay with these incipient Absolutist Monarchies where, with the partial exception of England, power would be concentrated ever more exclusively in the hands of the supreme monarchs. The culmination of this process was the reign of Louis XIV in France, who declared "*l'État c'est moi*". That kind of Absolutism came to an end in France with the French Revolution; but among the other monarchies of Europe not completely so till after the First World War. The revolutionaries, first in France and then elsewhere, overthrew the whole order of the Ancient Regime both in politics and society. Instead, they proclaimed a new republican order based on the principle of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. This then became the basis of modern ideological politics. This completes our cursory introductory sketch of the history of Western republican politics.

2 The Exceptional Nature of Egalitarianism

In this long and complicated story of Western politics we shall be mainly pre-occupied in this chapter with one strand, that of equality, the middle term in the revolutionary trinity. Liberty will be discussed only in passing, and in the next chapter we shall deal with fraternity. Like the two other terms, equality, too, harks back to the ancient Greeks and the polis. Of course, what the Greeks meant by equality is nothing like what we mean by it, for then there was never

5 See J.G.A Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, op. cit.

any thought of granting equality to any but the male citizens of the polis, those who were called upon to serve in its armies or navies and were eligible to attend its assemblies. All others were by definition excluded: these were the women, slaves, helots, metics and all others who were not citizens. *Homonomia* stood for the right to address the *ecclesia*, the right to exercise a vote; and in general, it connoted *isocratia* or the equality of power in democracies.

There were two opposed modes of equality in the Greek poleis, that of Sparta and that of Athens, the socialistic and the liberal in our terms. The former was a highly traditionalistic and partly archaic communistic equality of a community of hoplite warriors who shared most things in common because their almost sole concern was to train for excellence in battle. The latter was the equality of a newly constituted democracy where every man took part in the affairs of the assembly and took his turn serving in the offices to which he was chosen by lot. The contest between these two cities resulted in a long, bitter and debilitating war, the Peloponnesian War. Within many of the cities involved, the battle degenerated to ideological civil strife over equality, usually between rich and poor, that anticipated the revolutionary class wars of modern times.⁶ The Spartans were an elite caste of warriors ruling over a subservient population of helots. However, between themselves the Spartans maintained an exceptional state of equality; they designated themselves as the *homoioi* or peers. No individual was allowed to become rich or engage in any wealth creating enterprise such as trade that might promote inequality. In Athens, as opposed to the Spartan equality of peers, there developed the quite different form of democratic egalitarianism. The contrast between these two different conceptions of equality in the ancient city republics was outlined in Pericles' famous funeral oration at the start of the Peloponnesian War. Pericles spells out clearly why he believes that Athenian democratic equality is superior to Spartan communitarian equality, which is a very early foretaste of the much later debates between liberal capitalism and authoritarian socialism. Pericles explains Athenian democratic equality as follows:

Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hand not of a minority but of the whole people. When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law; when it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual

6 See Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (Harmondsworth UK: Penguin Classics, 1954), Book 1.

ability which the man possesses. No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty.⁷

Otherwise, Pericles avers, people were free to live as they liked; though that is not strictly speaking true, since liberalism in the modern sense did not yet exist. However, the two basic principles of liberal equality are clearly enunciated by Pericles: equality before the law and equality of opportunity.

Sparta won the military battle against Athens, but not the war of ideas against Athenian democracy. That survived both in Athens itself as an ongoing practice until the much later Roman conquest, but also in history in the books of the historians and philosophers – both those who argued against it, such as Plato in the *Republic*, and those who were a little more favourably disposed to it, such as Aristotle in the *Politics*. Democracy and the liberal equality it fostered remained as a permanent memory in the West. All the more so as similar battles to those in The Greek cities were fought out between the patricians and plebians throughout the period of the Roman republic, and a certain degree of equality in the rights and privileges of all Roman citizens was always maintained, even though no longer conferring any democratic powers during the empire.

However, once the empire was founded equality was no longer a major issue as a hierarchical society was gradually formed with an ever-widening distance between those on the bottom, the propertyless citizens, or the *proletarii*, and those on top, the senatorial elite. In between these two extremes were all sorts of grades of middle-class status, such as that of the equestrians or knights and freedmen, both of whom could engage in trade and attain huge wealth, as Petronius' *Satyricon* depicts it. However, during the empire's decline Diocletian's reforms established a hierarchical social order and inequalities became institutionalized and fixed as every man was obliged to remain in the occupation and station of life of his father. Society from then on became ever more hierarchically ordered, almost in line with Oriental Despotism, where equality had never figured, except as the equality of the faithful before God in Muslim societies. Christian equality of souls before God was not much more egalitarian than that; and both Muslim and Christian societies were compatible with every form of gross inequality, including slavery and serfdom.

Medieval society in Europe was highly hierarchically ordered, based on the separation of the three primary estates according to their functions: those who pray, those who fight and those who work. Later these came to be politically

⁷ Ibid, 117.

represented in the so-called three houses of parliament: that of the clergy, the lords and the commoners, which prevailed all over Europe. With the rise of the Absolutist Monarchs, as most typically in France, these parliamentary assemblies were prorogued for centuries. When Louis XVI was forced to briefly reconvene the three estates in 1789, the well-known disastrous consequences for the monarchy ensued. However, in England the representation of the three estates in parliament followed a very different course. With the Reformation the three were reduced to two as the clergy were merged with the lords, this made for a parliament of two houses, Lords and Commoners, which has endured ever since. Though, of course, the balance of power between the monarch, the House of Lords and the House of Commons subtly altered over the centuries. It was not till the early twentieth century that the House of Commons came out decisively on top as the unchallenged effective government of Britain. Only then was democratic equality attained, or soon after when women also gained suffrage.

In his most recent work, the economic historian Thomas Piketty has taken up the theme of the three orders of medieval society and made it the keynote of his whole account of hierarchy and social inequality.⁸ In addressing the European medieval context, he has built on the work of his *Annales* school predecessors Georges Duby and Jacques le Goff.⁹ However, he has extrapolated this three-tiered hierarchy also to many non-European societies as well. He believes that the trifunctional schema applies in general also to India, Islam, China and Japan, maintaining that “the ternary pattern can be found in nearly all premodern societies throughout the world ...”¹⁰ Piketty does grant that “many variants exist, however, and the differences between them are ultimately more interesting than the superficial similarities.”¹¹ Many of the similarities are, indeed, superficial, such as that between the estate system in medieval Europe and the caste system in India, despite their common Indo-Germanic roots in prehistory. The differences are still greater when either of these is compared to the Chinese imperial system, for this from ancient times was based on administration by literary scholars or philosopher-statesmen and featured a surprising absence of any aristocratic warrior elite. Nevertheless, all of these are highly hierarchical systems, and Piketty is not wrong to point to

8 Thomas Piketty, *Capitalism and Ideology*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

9 Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

10 Ibid, 52.

11 Ibid, 52.

them as evidence of the almost universal prevalence of inequality throughout the whole history of civilizations.

However, the one exceptional case where little of Piketty's argument applies is that of the city in the West, starting with the Greek polis which we previously discussed. Piketty is completely oblivious to this glaring anomaly to his whole thesis. He has obviously not consulted Weber's masterly work on the Occidental city to which we previously referred. Weber poses the key critical question: "Why did the civic development not start in Asia but in the Mediterranean basin, later in Europe"? And he replies as follows:

An answer is already provided so far as the growth of an urban community is bound up with the emergence of the city fraternizations. In China the magical closure of the clans, in India the closure of the castes eliminated the possibility of civic confederations. In China the clans as bearers of the ancestors' cult were indestructible. In India the castes were carriers of a particular style of life upon the observance of which salvation and reincarnation depended. Ritualistically, thus, the castes were mutually exclusive. The ritualistic obstacles to fraternization were more absolute in India than in China, where subjection to the clan was only relative.¹²

As Weber shows, it was not only fraternity that was peculiar to the Western city, but liberty and equality as well. The birth of democracy in its proper political form took place there, and only there; and the demand for equality was only voiced there as well. This does not mean that either democracy or egalitarianism was always prevalent in the Western city; far from it, for only in exceptional times did these political values obtain. But these were the exceptions that proved so decisive for the much later emergence of democratic government, following the American and French Revolutions, which enshrined liberty and equality in their liberal forms. Against these there arose the workers' movements that made demands for greater equality, which eventually developed into Socialism. As we previously showed, liberty, equality and fraternity had its basis in the Western city already from early on, starting with the Greek polis, and it was subsequently never completely lost sight of in the cities, even when hierarchy was at its most dominant.

Throughout most of its history the city was neither democratic nor egalitarian. It was usually ruled by an elite of urban aristocrats or patricians or a mercantile clique of guild-masters or what in Italy was called the *popolo grasso*

12 Max Weber, *The City*, op. cit, 119.

who maintained dominance over subordinate groups known as the demos or plebs or commoners or journeymen and labourers or the *popolo minuto*. This invariably led to class conflict and strife which is so well known from the history of Athens, Rome, Florence, Bruges and almost all other such cities. A triune hierarchy such as Piketty postulates was very rarely present in these city class structures or their attendant conflicts. It was mostly a binary affair of top and bottom strata, as Marx and Engels present it in the *Communist Manifesto*.

Mostly, of course, in these contests victory went to the top, but occasionally the underlings succeeded in upsetting the established social order and came out on top. This is how democracy and egalitarianism were established first in Athens, later to a lesser degree in republican Rome, and later still in the quasi-democracies of the Italian city-states, above all Florence during the Middle Ages. The process whereby this was achieved differed in each case, and what resulted was also very different. Nevertheless, the outcomes in these different places at different times had something in common which we can classify in general terms as democratic and egalitarian. Weber devotes a whole chapter to comparing the ancient and medieval democracies, and he describes the differences between them as “the ancient democracy of small peasants and the medieval democracy of professional traders”.¹³ He also contrasts “the class opposition in antiquity and the Middle Ages”, as well as that between the class conflict in Greece and Rome in antiquity.

This history was never completely forgotten even during the height of Absolutism from Ferdinand and Isabella’s unification of Spain and reconquest of Granada to its demise with the start of the French Revolution. During these three centuries there were only rarely any demands for equality. Those which did eventuate were couched in religious terms stemming from the Reformation. One such was the peasant and Anabaptist revolts, which Luther so vehemently denounced; later there were the Diggers and Levellers during the English Civil War, which Cromwell put down. Their notion of equality was expressed in the folk jingle: “When Adam dived and Eve spun, who was then the gentleman?”

But already the Enlightenment was dawning on the historical horizon and the demand for equality and democracy began to be couched no longer in the language of religion but in that of the philosophers, and carried a far more dangerous message. According to the historian Jonathan Israel, it came initially from Spinoza rather than from Locke. Locke asserted the individual rights to life, liberty and property, but it was Spinoza who went further and demanded equality and democracy as well. According to Israel, this initiated a democratic

13 Ibid, 201.

Radical Enlightenment of the continental *philosophes* that was opposed to the conservative Moderate Enlightenment of the English and Scottish thinkers,¹⁴ who still favoured the status quo. From the Enlightenment *philosophes* to the American and French Revolutions is but a straight path, according to Israel's account. And it is along this route that equality, after the hiatus of more than two thousand years, entered once more into the arena of struggle in European politics. With the abolition of the Absolutist Monarchy and the dissolution of the political estates, symbolically enacted in the Tennis Court Oath during the French Revolution, the long period of triune hierarchical society was over. Europe entered into a new period of bourgeois society where a new battle for power was enacted, and equality became its most burning issue.

During the nineteenth century the struggle for and against equality was conducted by parties of the Right and parties of the Left. Those on the Right wished to preserve various forms of the old inequalities, which varied in their nature as between those of the old reactionaries who longed for a restoration of the Ancient Regime to the new conservatives who were for constitutional monarchy. Those on the Left were equally diverse in their demands for equality: Liberals advocated only equality of opportunity and equality before the law, whereas the Socialists were demanding equality in income and ownership and even the abolition of classes. The battle took place either as peaceful parliamentary competition, as in England; or, as in France, between different regimes regularly punctuated by revolutions. Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, provides a good account of this conflict in France during the 1848 Revolution, written, of course, from an extremely egalitarian socialist point of view. When nineteenth century Socialism became twentieth century Bolshevism after the Russian Revolution, the battle for equality was enacted as a war of ideologies. The three-sided fight between Liberalism, Fascism and Bolshevism down to the Second World War became a two-sided Cold War after 1945 between an extreme form of Socialism represented by the Soviet Union and an extreme form of Liberalism represented by the United States. That ended with the victory of America over the Soviet Union and indirectly also over Maoist China.

China under Mao embraced a totalitarian system that imposed an extreme form of equality, one never before attempted on that scale. It was vaguely reminiscent of that of Sparta, but in China Sparta's few thousand peers were vastly exceeded by hundreds of millions of comrades. In both, the individual

14 Jonathan Israel, *The Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

was totally subordinated to the state and there was a complete suppression of individual will and autonomy. Sparta's model of an egalitarian society was sustainable over many centuries because it was based on exploiting a subordinate helot population. China's Maoist version was not sustainable because it would have kept the great majority of its people in peasant poverty, meaning that China could never modernise and become a major power. Under Deng China reversed course and embraced capitalist inequality. This was a huge economic success, but as a result China has now become one of the most unequal societies on earth. Russia, after it abandoned Communism, has also evolved in a similar way. In both cases, the failure of Socialism gives us plenty to think about and raises many questions.

What kind of historical lesson does this impart? What went wrong with this kind of socialist egalitarianism? Was it bound to fail for purely economic reasons or could it have succeeded with better government and leadership? How much of prosperity or liberty should a society be prepared to forego for the sake of equality? Is any kind of socialist society viable in the modern world? These are some of the issues we shall raise and discuss in the next two sections.

3 The Failure of Egalitarianism in Socialist Societies

The great ideological battles over equality in the twentieth century were between liberal capitalism and democratic socialism. But the great hope of democratic socialism, though often enough mooted in theory, never eventuated in practice, where it usually amounted to totalitarian dictatorship. What did occasionally ensue was a social democratic variant of liberal capitalism, as in the Scandinavian countries; but that is not socialism as originally conceived and fought for over two centuries. Another variant of capitalism that also occasionally won out during this period was despotic capitalism; for despite the libertarian hopes of the exponents of free markets, capitalism does not necessarily lead to democracy, it can just as easily go in the opposite political direction. This has never been more apparent than at present, given developments in China, Russia and other former socialist or communist states. In what follows we shall mainly be concerned with the pure forms or ideal-types of liberal capitalism and dictatorial socialism, represented best in the twentieth century by America and the Soviet Union. The mixed forms we shall leave till the end of this chapter.

The two forms differ in that the one privileges liberty over equality and the other promotes equality over liberty. It has long been understood that it is not possible to satisfy both in equal measure at once. Thus already prior

to the Russian Revolution, Simmel “was aware of the tragedy that lay in the fact that in modern society equality could apparently be achieved only at the expense of liberty, liberty only at the expense of equality, and in this regard he called as witness such poets as Goethe, who had reviled as fantasists and charlatans those who promised the people equality and liberty at the same time.”¹⁵ However, the incompatibility is not quite as great as Simmel and others assume because the two terms are defined quite differently in the two political philosophies.

In liberalism liberty is defined primarily in terms of the individual as a free and autonomous agent who is endowed with the inalienable Lockean rights of life, liberty and property. The last of these, rendered in the Preamble to the American Constitution as the pursuit of happiness, is particularly important for it is the legal guarantee of free market capitalism. Liberty, in turn, underlies the political system of representative democracy. The three fundamental values together provide clear safeguards against the encroachments of the state into the private sphere of civil society where individuals encounter each other and cooperate and compete, usually both at once.

In contrast to liberty, equality in the liberal definition takes on a much more restricted scope. Basically, it means equality before the law and equality of opportunity, but not much more than that in most libertarian ideologies. Equality before the law means that the same law applies to all individuals regardless of any other differences. In practice, of course, it means that the rich can avail themselves of much better legal services than the poor, but apart from that the law does not rule in favour of the one rather than the other, it is blind to all such considerations. Equality of opportunity is not so clear and straight forward and it varies according to the different spheres in which people compete with each other. In the capitalist sphere of market transactions, it ensures that everyone is able to buy and sell without discrimination and without any other restraints on trade, such as monopolies. In the sphere of public offices, it means that the competition for appointment to office is conducted without regard to privilege or prejudice; or as the Napoleonic slogan proclaimed, *carrière ouverte aux talents*. This has been subsequently interpreted to outlaw discrimination on the basis of class, race or gender in all competitive matters of a public kind which are open to all contenders.

In this limited and largely formalistic sense of equality, liberalism is compatible with all other manner of inequality. Thus, the open market competition it

15 Wolf Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 240.

promotes is sure to result in huge disparities of wealth since some are bound to be much better at wheeling and dealing than others, and these differentials only increase with the generations. Wealth in turn leads to all kinds of other disparities in attainment. In a society like America or Britain it leads to differences in education since quality education has to be procured at a high price. Educational prerequisites in turn lead to better appointments, jobs and promotions. Social status due to wealth is also usually a factor in such matters. In fact, as we shall see, the disparities in liberal capitalist societies, such as America or Britain at present, are almost as large as those that were current in rigidly segregated class and status societies prior to liberalism. There were periods when liberal egalitarianism seemed to make some headway, as in the three decades following the Second World War. But since then, there has been a steady drift into inequality. The formal provision of equality of opportunity tells one nothing concerning who can or cannot take advantage of the available opportunities. As Anatol France remarked long ago, both rich and poor have equal right to sleep under bridges, or, one might add, to speculate on the stock exchange.

Most liberal thinkers have accepted such inegalitarian outcomes as the consequence of the very success of capitalism in creating wealth and improving everyone's standard of living, which at least in the initial stages cannot be distributed more evenly; but they went on to argue that in time, with greater government and public effort, a more equitable outcome will emerge. Other thinkers who were more libertarian, such as Deirdre McCloskey, have recognized that this is mere wishful thinking and the gross inequalities in outcome are bound to remain; but they contend that this is unavoidable, the inevitable consequences of wealth creation. Still more libertarian thinkers, such as Hayek, have argued that inequality in outcomes is necessary for achievement, and is therefore a desirable state of affairs since there can be no progress of any kind without this spur to innovation. He believes this fact has been amply confirmed by history:

Recent European experience strongly confirms this. The rapidity with which rich societies here have become static, if not stagnant, societies through egalitarian policies, while impoverished but highly competitive countries have become very dynamic and progressive, has been one of the most conspicuous features of the post-war period.¹⁶

16 Frederick von Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (London: Routledge, 1960), 44.

According to Hayek, it is always the few able and talented ones who are creative and bring benefits to all others, hence they must be allowed to rise to the top. Meritocracy almost by definition necessitates inequality since those who succeed prosper and those who fail simply suffer the consequences of failure.

The socialists believe otherwise, for according to them progress is premised on equality. They take literally the egalitarian Rousseauian premise that all men are born free and equal, and they undertake to keep them equal for the rest of their lives, or at least as much so as possible. This is their ideal, for in reality they grant that even socialism will generate its own inequalities. But, they contend, these inequalities can no longer be based on the possession of private property, for the abolition of private property is the basic principle of every form of socialism. Property must be held in common, either by the State or by some other communitarian body, for otherwise it acts as the inevitable cause of inequality.

In an incipient form such egalitarianism was already current among socialistically inclined thinkers during the French Revolution. Condorcet argued that progress could only occur if there was equality both among nations and among individuals.¹⁷ The inequality of individuals was to be promoted by an equitable distribution of property through the abolition of inheritance and through free education of both men and women. These are panaceas that have been tried ever since, always with variable outcomes. Even more radical proposals were propounded by William Godwin in England and the many so-called Utopian Socialists in France. The foremost among these was Proudhon who made the startling pronouncement that property is theft, and advocated that distribution of wealth should be based on the principle "from each according to his ability to each according to his need."¹⁸ Such a principle has in fact never been put into effect in any existing society, for it is truly utopian.

Marx was critical of Proudhon, whom he likened to Rousseau, and countered his *Philosophy of Poverty* with his own inverse *Poverty of Philosophy* for he claimed that Proudhon got everything back to front and upside down.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Marx, too, does not depart from the basic socialist ideals of egalitarianism. The abolition of private property was the key to this since ownership was the basis of the whole class system. But Marx was much more realistic than other socialists about what he meant by private property, which

17 Nicholas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, *Sketch of the Intellectual Progress of Mankind*, trans. Anonymous (London: J. Johnson, 1795).

18 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Philosophy of Poverty: The System of Economic Contradictions* (New York: The Floating Press, 2012).

19 Karl Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1950).

he defined as control of the means of production. In particular, what he was most concerned with was the means of production of an industrial economy, such as the manufacturing and finance sectors, which were in the hands of capitalists. He believed that socialism and egalitarianism would ensue simply from expropriating the capitalists and placing the means of production into common ownership, in the first place that of the state.

To achieve these ends, Marx and his subsequent followers were intent on instituting a dictatorship of the proletariat, which in effect did away with any liberal conception of individual freedom or with democracy. Thus, liberty was of far lesser concern to them than equality. But they were not content to forfeit liberty altogether. To retain it they undertook a two-step process: firstly, by redefining it, and secondly by postponing its full realisation till the stage of the perfection of socialism and its transition to communism. Liberty was redefined in an anti-liberal sense as no longer pertaining to the freedom of the individual, but the liberation of the whole society from the control of capitalists and the bourgeois class, in something approximating to the ancient Greek *eleutheria*. In this sense liberty was given a communitarian rather than individualistic gloss. But, they insisted, ultimately under achieved communism individual freedom would be attained in a higher form than any available under capitalism. This was premised on the assumption that individuals, too, would attain a higher state of collective being, and would no longer be the selfish pleasure or utility maximisers that bourgeois philosophy and economics assumed them to be. They would become free creative spirits in a free society.

Sad to say, none of this could be realized in reality, that is, in the real existing socialist regimes that arose in Marx's name. Instead, what emerged was a totalitarian tyranny that had scarcely ever been equalled before on earth. Not only was liberty lost, equality, for the sake of which this loss might have been condoned, was never attained. In Stalin's Russia new forms of privilege developed in some ways as pernicious as the old class and status relations. True, private property could no longer be amassed in large quantities and unearned income acquired as profit, but access to state property and services was very differentially distributed. Those who constituted a new elite of the top people – Party cadres, Nomenclature officials, officers of high rank, favoured artists and writers, and so on – could draw on resources that all others could only dream about. They also had ways of ensuring through *protekzia* and connections that their children had a smooth path to these privileged positions. All others had to endure constant shortages and endless queuing for mere basic staples. The peasants, on behalf of whom the Revolution had been launched, ended up worse off than their ancestors, the serfs before their liberation. Even

more degraded was a large population of slaves, the *zeks* of the *Gulag* system of prison camps.

Churchill's pronouncement made in 1945 proved amply vindicated: "The inherent rise of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings; and the inherent virtue of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries." Of course, what is meant by "equal" and by "miseries" is a relative matter. Compared to Mao's China, Stalin's Russia was neither very equal nor very miserable. As we have seen, there were large inequalities but there was just enough for everyone to get something, at least after 1945, which was not the case in China at all times. One of the most puzzling aspects concerning both these socialist regimes is why they proved to be such disastrous economic failures. We shall return to this issue later.

By contrast to socialism, capitalism has been a huge economic success, nowhere more so than in America where the standard of living over the course of the twentieth century rose almost tenfold. But this "blessing", in Churchill's words, has been accompanied by the curse of huge inequalities; wealth has been very unevenly distributed, extremely so before the First World War and just as disproportionately now at the height of globalization. The disparities between the top and the bottom of the social hierarchy are as bad as they ever were, as the statistics of income and property ownership clearly demonstrate.²⁰

Does this degree of inequality really matter, provided that even those at the very bottom of the scale have enough to get by? According to libertarians such as Hayek and the members of the Chicago School of Economics, it does not, for "inequality of wealth and rights was accepted and even celebrated as a necessary feature of a successful market system and as a force for progress", as Shoshana Zuboff puts it.²¹ Thus, Deidre McCloskey states that "the size of the Gini coefficient or the share of the bottom 10 percent is irrelevant to the noble and ethically relevant and actually attainable purpose of raising the poor to a condition of dignity, Frankfurt's 'enough'."²² She distinguishes sharply between eliminating poverty and lessening inequality; she supports the former but not the latter. As she puts it, "in ethical truth we wish to raise up the poor to 'enough' for them to function in a democratic society and to have full human lives."²³

20 See Thomas Piketty, *Capitalism and Ideology*, op. cit.

21 Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the Frontier of Power* (London: Profile Books, 2019), 38.

22 Deidre N. McCloskey, *Bourgeois Equality: How Ideas, Not Capital or Institutions Enrich the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 48.

23 Ibid, 46.

But is it really possible in a highly inegalitarian society, such as America at present, for the poor to function democratically and to have full human lives even if they have enough to satisfy their basic needs? The problem is an inter-generational one, for those who are born poor will now almost certainly end up poor whereas those who are born rich will almost as certainly remain rich. Those who are born poor face the prospect of having little chance of attaining anything in life at all for most things in American society depend directly or indirectly on wealth and on other inherited advantages. Thus, for example, educational achievement for the vast majority, with but few exceptions, depends largely on the ability to pay for good schooling at all levels, with the fees for the best elite universities at levels that only the very rich can afford. It is true that it does require the passing of exams, but entry is made easier for those whose parents are former alumni or those whose parents make huge endowments – or in the last resort whose parents can pay to cheat, as the well-publicized universities admissions scandals have revealed.

In any case, even without monetary advantages, the children of the rich, especially from long established families, inherit what Bourdieu has termed “cultural capital”. This is a complex of multiple factors to do with their home environment and their parents’ and friends’ attitudes, expectations, and a host of other unspecifiable factors that make for success. Children from poor families will only very rarely have such inherited benefits. It is true that the most able and determined can overcome such huge disadvantages, but only where outside help is available to enable them to do so; but by its very nature such help is limited and can only be effective for the rare cases of very exceptional students.

All in all, the rich are born to succeed and the poor are born to fail. Not only in education, but in every other sphere of American life the odds are stacked in favour of the rich and against the poor. Every kind of achievement calls for connections, contacts, influence, knowing the right people, and other such social factors which those with a good family background are most likely to have and anyone of disadvantaged origin will almost certainly lack. Once again it is true that such handicaps can be overcome by exceptional individuals, as the example of Barack Obama proves, but how many such exceptions are there? In general, the proportion of people of high achievement in most avenues who came from disadvantaged backgrounds is very low, and it is very high for those with inherited advantages. There are still some career prospects left in fields where family wealth or connections matter little. This is true for sport or modelling or entertainment or popular music and a few other lines of work. It is to these that poor people tend to aspire. But inevitably this means that of the many who try their luck only very few actually succeed. For the great

majority embarking on such a career is a prescription for failure. But the lure of becoming a star is so strong that many will always be tempted to try to succeed.

For the very large and ever-growing segment of American people who grow up with the almost certain prospect they will not amount to anything in life and might well end up worse off than their parents, how is it possible “to function in a democratic society and have full human lives”, as McCloskey puts it? Little wonder that there is so much resentment and unrest in American society at present. According to Zuboff, studies of rebellious social movements point to the one general conclusion:

The terms of reference in nearly every study sound the same drum-beat: lack of opportunity, lack of access to education, marginalization, deprivation, grievance, hopelessness ... they all shared a point of origin in the themes of economic inequality and exclusion.²⁴

As we shall see from what follows, the critique of liberal capitalism must go way beyond social inequality and social disruption, it must extend to the kinds of culturally destroying consequences that capitalism has brought about by making everything subject to the market mechanism, transforming all goods into commodities and values into prices. This, at its furthest extent, is what has most harmed civilization. However, in purely economic respects, capitalism has brought enormous wealth, which even when malapportioned has nevertheless brought benefits to everyone. Nobody starves or goes without basic necessities in capitalist countries, as they did at times in socialist ones. To that extent Churchill was proved right, the creation of miseries and their equal sharing is a propensity of socialism not of capitalism. Nowhere was this better demonstrated than in Mao's socialist China as compared to Deng's capitalist China.

We can take this contrasting case of what happened in China as the jumping off point for a historical study of egalitarianism. Why is it that socialistic or communistic projects have so rarely been attempted in history? Why did they invariably fail? Is socialism doomed to inevitable failure? Going by historical precedent, including that of recent times, one is almost bound to conclude that this must be so. By contrast to socialism, the much more limited equality of liberal societies has proved much more successful, especially so when instituted by social democratic governments. This prompts the wider question of

24 Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, op. cit, 42.

what are the limits to equality, so what can be aimed for with some prospects of success?

The greatest degree of equality ever attained was in Mao's China, at the cost of the greatest misery. Is it possible that the two are bound to go together? To force everyone to be equal in every respect is almost tantamount to forcing everyone to be poor. Mao achieved this goal by transforming all people into proletarian workers, except for party cadres and military personnel and other such favoured groups. But they all lived alike, dressed alike and, as far as this was enforceable, thought alike. But to achieve this degree of egalitarianism, Mao had to eradicate everything that made for distinctiveness and difference in Chinese society and culture. Thus, everything that characterized Chinese civilization down to the Communist Revolution had to be expunged. Not only was private property abolished, but so, too, was private life, and everything else that made for individuality had to be eliminated, including the mainstay of all previous Chinese society, the family and its ancestral traditions. The campaign against Confucius was thus the climax of the whole effort to destroy tradition and the norms of deference to traditional authority that went with it. It was the death-knell of all Chinese culture and social structure as practiced for around three millennia since the very start of this unique civilization.

Socialism in China succeeded in coming to power spectacularly against all the odds; it failed equally spectacularly against all expectations. It was truly a gigantic social experiment in egalitarianism and it ended in complete and utter disaster, without any redeeming features. To recover, China had to take the opposite capitalist course; but without the liberalism that usually comes with it in the West. Instead, China has moved to its own traditionalist brand of despotic capitalism. This has in turn promoted vast inequalities in every respect. It is now one of the most inegalitarian societies on earth.

Both in China and Russia the worst error of socialism was to assume that once private property was abolished and class differences were eliminated, there would be a natural tendency for society to assume an egalitarian cast. This was not an unreasonable assumption given the socialist view that these were the only or even the main causes of inequality. Hence, if these unjust differentiating factors were removed, then a society of equals was bound to emerge. Socialists, above all Marx and Engels, failed to take account of other factors, both social and individual, apart from the ones they identified, that tended to create inequalities, and which would persist even in a socialist society where private ownership and classes were no more.

A leading social factor present in all societies is the human family which produces the tendency of parents to look after and care for their children at all stages in life, usually well into adulthood. This introduces a hugely

differentiating factor in the prospects children have. For it determines who they are and what endowments they have inherited, what they can rely on, who are their relations and friends, and a host of other conditions which clearly derive from family background and the natural tendency of parents to favour their own children over others. Another key factor is how many children they have and so to what extent they need to divide their resources between them. And finally, there is the whole nebulous but crucial factor of cultural endowment that a family inherits due to long-standing historical factors going back numerous generations. This so-called cultural capital, operating as parental influence on the upbringing of their children, can play a positive or negative role on their subsequent success. It is positive when, as usual among the bourgeoisie, it works to make children want to succeed and endows them with some of the means, both cultural and psychological, to do so. But it is negative when, as in peasant or slum-dweller families, it tends in the opposite direction and discourages children from trying too hard or directs them to other forms of success which are not socially valued, such as physical or sexual prowess.

There is no way of eliminating the impact of family background on the fate of children, short of abolishing the family altogether or deliberately mitigating its influence. In fact, egalitarian societies, such as Sparta, did develop in this direction, reducing the influence of family life as far as possible on male children, the future warriors; there was less concern with females. Plato, in modelling his utopian society on Sparta, went much further and sought for a total elimination of the family in his republic. This has never been attempted in practice. The closest to it was the Israeli *kibbutz* where children were as far as possible brought up in crèches in common within the one small community. It has not proved an enduring success, but this might be because *kibbutzim* were only a small sub-set in a much larger more "normal" society. Whether such a thing is possible throughout a whole society and what the consequences of such a wholesale attempt would be is not known because it has never been tried. The nearest to it was the brief experiment with communes, initiated by Mao, which proved a dismal failure – but that might not be an altogether fair test since it was carried out with so much duress in very straitened economic circumstances.

In so far as they saw it as a prime source of unequal outcomes, socialists have tended to be averse to the family. Some of the early so-called utopian socialists sought to devise communitarian schemes for the bringing up of children that would counter family influence, even if not doing away with family life altogether. The utopian socialist Charles Fourier tried to do away with what he called the "civilized" family that he detested and substitute for it a communitarian life of phalanxes of ideally 1620 people living jointly in a phalanstery

where men and women would be equal and liberated and children be brought up in nurseries. The main socialist theorists, Marx and Engels and their successors have not paid much attention to the problem of the family, leaving it to be somehow solved after the Revolution. But it was not solved in theory before the Revolution or in practice after it.

In Soviet Russia family background at first worked strongly against those with an aristocratic or bourgeois origin and in favour of those of proletarian or peasant descent. But later, once the society became established, it became obvious that the children of those who had standing or power, and the obvious relations and connections that went with this, had a great advantage compared with those who did not have such parental support. A new class system was still in the making when Soviet society foundered. What emerged after the fall of Communism simply built on previous tendencies as those high up in the State apparatus and Party became the new oligarchs who acquired most of the wealth. Something similar has happened in China, with power and new wealth falling into the hands of so-called princelings, the children of former cadres.

As the examples of China and Russia demonstrate, differences are built into society because some people have to assume power and authority over others, so that some take on superior and others subordinate roles. They might all call each other comrades, but there is no disguising the evident facts of hauteur and deference that these differential positions in the hierarchy of authority and influence necessarily bring, with these disparities. In Soviet Russia going up in the hierarchy depended primarily on Party membership and the resultant system of patronage called *protekzia* that developed as high officials sought to place their followers and clients above those of their competitors. Thus, a struggle for power and position, which is inherent in any modern society, especially as it functions bureaucratically, is as much conducive to status and class differences within socialism as the competition for money within capitalism. And though it might not give rise to classes differentiated in the economic way of ownership and capital, it just as readily produces classes in the way of status for holders of rank and position, or exclusive membership of powerful cliques, or of select committees and other such groupings – and, above all, proximity to those in supreme power. Whether classes based on ownership and capital are any better or worse than those based on position and power is a moot point, but given that the former is compatible with liberalism and democracy and the latter is not, it seems that most people tend to vote with their feet in favour of that kind of inegalitarian outcome rather than the other.

Once again it is regrettable that socialist theorists paid so little serious attention to these problems of power, believing that they would somehow solve themselves after the Revolution. Marx has almost nothing to say about how

the State will function or how authority will be exercised in the period before it supposedly “withers away” during the transition from socialism to communism. The problem of hierarchy and bureaucracy does not much concern him either, once power is in the hands of a dictatorship of the proletariat. In fact, by putting power in the hands of a dictatorship, rather than allowing, at least in theory, for democratic forms of popular participation and consent to be exercised, Marx doomed socialism to the kind of totalitarian outcomes which eventuated. For once a small faction of conspiratorial intellectuals declared themselves to be the dictatorship of the proletariat, it was more or less inevitable that they would establish a totalitarian state.

Whether a liberal democratic socialism is possible is still unclear because it has never been seriously tried in reality. Alexander Dubček in Czechoslovakia tried to institute socialism with a human face, and this promising attempt was crushed before it could be instituted. But had he been left alone to go on with the experiment, could it have succeeded? It is doubtful that his country would have remained socialist for very long given what happened later throughout Eastern Europe once Soviet repression was lifted. Not a single one of these countries chose to remain socialist.

The lesson to be drawn from the long and tragic failure of socialism is that this is not the way that egalitarianism can be achieved, even to the extent that it can be achieved at all. Indeed, one of the main causes of the failure of socialism is its attempt to bring about equality by mere fiat and force. Thus, the Soviet authorities in Russia not only deprived those of aristocratic or bourgeois background of their property and possessions but discriminated against them and their children in any competition for place or position in education or any organization, including the army and bureaucracy. Instead, there was a systematic policy of positive discrimination, rigorously practiced under Stalin, of favouring those of the right class background, especially proletarians and peasants. The results of this policy were evident in the later evolution of Russian society. Certainly, some of great ability rose to great heights and prominence who might not have done so in any other society. However, many more of little talent or aptitude filled equally high positions and proceeded to mismanage whatever they were tasked to accomplish. This kind of forcible imposition of equality does far more damage to society in general than the good it does to the few capable ones who are given their chance to shine.

This points to a further crucial factor that inevitably makes for inequality, one that socialists have also tended to neglect, and that is the undeniable differences among people in intelligence and most likely in other talents. To what extent these are genetically influenced is the subject of still ongoing research in psychology and involves disputes as to what is due to nature and what to

nurture that are very difficult and may even be in principle impossible to resolve. But whatever it is due to, children already very early in life show wide discrepancies in aptitude in very many respects. No amount of later socialization or education can overcome these largely inherited talents or handicaps. These become magnified over generations as people of similar abilities naturally tend to marry each other. This then works in with what we previously showed about families favouring their own to generate an inherent drift in all societies towards inequality, which can only be countered to a limited degree.

In societies where inequalities are long established and solidified, positive discrimination can be used to counter class, race or gender differences and promote a measure of meritocracy. If applied judiciously in a carefully calibrated way, this need not have grossly negative effects and will promote the lifting of bias against all those previously discriminated against. For one thing, it will show that people of whatever class, race or gender can be as able and talented as those of any other. However, enforced by mere fiat or in a blunt and indiscriminate way it will inevitably lead to a debasement of standards and will be socially injurious in the long run. Thus, setting purely arbitrary quotas will tend to have that effect, especially if these are not merely temporary expedients to facilitate integration, but become fixed arrangements that are enshrined as rights. The Soviet experience is an indication of where this practice leads. There are now tendencies in that direction in Western societies as well.

The battle for equality can never be finally won, but must be fought for over and over again. Left to itself without such countervailing efforts, societies will tend to drift into inequalities of ever greater degree and of all possible kinds. Elites will always emerge to concentrate prestige and privilege and anything else worth having into their own hands. Where free markets operate, money and success will fall into fewer and ever fewer hands. Where power is at play it tends to move upwards and concentrate in those at the top. Whatever factor it is along which people can differentiate themselves as superior and inferior, that factor can become socially entrenched and solidified as a permanent basis of inequality, as this has tended to happen in hierarchical societies.

On the other hand, when equality is a fundamental value to be striven for politically, as it has historically been the case only in Western societies or at present their successors all over the world, then battles for equality will be fought both peacefully and violently and often won; though such victories are always partial and only last for a limited period. Hence, inevitably, as inegalitarian differences reassert themselves once more, the fight will have to be resumed once again. Such has been the battle throughout the ages for liberty and democracy which has been won and lost and won again, over and over. By

contrast, the battle for socialism seems definitively to be lost, at least for the foreseeable future, but not necessarily the battle for equality.

4 The Failure of Egalitarianism in Liberal Societies

The battle for equality within capitalism is still ongoing, though now the odds are stacked against success, perhaps more than ever before in the history of America. Much better outcomes have been achieved in Europe, though there, too, everything is tilting in favour of the rich, especially so in Britain after the Thatcher privatization reforms. Nevertheless, Scandinavia is still the showpiece of egalitarianism within a liberal capitalist society. The Old World, despite its feudal history of aristocratic and bourgeois domination, has by now outdone the New World, which made such a promising start in egalitarianism in the nineteenth century and after the Second World War. This requires historical explanation which we shall proceed to outline in what follows.

America began as an independent nation dedicated to liberty, where government of the people, by the people, for the people would prevail for ever after, as Lincoln so memorably put it. Namely, it was the first enduring experiment in liberal democracy. The liberal principle of equality, that of equal opportunity for all, also seemed to prevail as America became the land of opportunity to which Europeans flocked to give themselves that chance in life that they could not have in their own class- and caste-ridden nations.

And, indeed, that remained true for a long time. What made it possible was the fact that America offered almost endless land and resources with a moving frontier that reached ever westward and offered anyone bold enough the opportunity of a fresh start. There were few if any restrictions or constraints on how far such a person could go because there was no established aristocracy or church, no controlling monarchy, no fixed national borders, no manacles of the mind and no obligatory deference to be paid to anyone or anything. This was the America that de Tocqueville observed and described during the Jacksonian presidency. This was the America after the Civil War that strove for the expansion of everything, of wealth and industry, of national power and might, of science and technology, and also, it was hoped, of culture and art. And those who had the drive and ability made it all happen. To some extent this is still true today, but much less so, as opportunities have dwindled and are ever more monopolized by those who have an established start in life. Trump's grandfather arrived in America with nothing and left behind a small fortune; Trump's father multiplied that inheritance many times over; Trump has taken

that to the height of riches and power – all in three generations. Had Trump started now like his grandfather he would have got nowhere.

Today it is still possible for a few exceptional individuals to come from nowhere with nothing and end up at the very top, but increasingly this is more of an exceptional fairy tale ending rather than what used to be the ordinary course from rags to riches or from nonentity to celebrity or from bottom to top, starting from nowhere. Obama's life story is such an unlikely outcome; Trump's is the more usual one. Gates, Jobs, Zuckerberg, Bezos and a few others are the exceptional billionaires, most others inherit their wealth and then increase it many times over.

Wealth in America is becoming increasingly more concentrated at the top. This means that an ever-smaller proportion of the accumulating growth goes to those lower down. Wages for workers in the last forty years have not gone up at all, or have even declined and salaries for the middle classes have not improved either. The so-called working poor are increasing in number. For the very first time in American history most of the young can expect to do worse than their parents.

Thus, as the common saying has it, as the poor get poorer, the rich get richer. The work of the economist Thomas Piketty has substantiated this truth with the relevant tables and statistics and provided an economic explanation for this ever-growing disparity; whether his or any other is the right explanation shall not concern us here. The figures themselves, which are not in dispute, speak for themselves, James Bridle sums it up as follows:

In the United States in 2014, the richest 0.01 percent, comprising just 16,000 families, controlled 11.2 percent of the total wealth – a situation comparable to 1916, the time of greatest inequality on record. The top 0.1 percent today hold 22 percent of the total wealth – the same as the bottom 90 percent. And the great recession has only accelerated the process: the top 1 percent captured 95 percent of income growth from 2009 to 2012. The situation, while not quite as stark, is headed in the same way in Europe, where accumulated wealth – much of it inherited – is approaching levels not seen since the end of the nineteenth century.²⁵

25 James Bridle, *The New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future* (London: Verso, 2018), 112.

This trend is against the expectations entertained in America for the past two centuries by both intellectuals and common folk. Bridle explains what this means:

This is an inversion of the commonly held idea of progress, wherein social development leads inexorably toward greater equality. Since the 1950s, economists have believed that in advanced economies, economic growth reduces the income disparity between rich and poor. Known as the Kuznets curve ... this doctrine claims that economic inequality increases as societies industrialize, but then decreases as mass education levels the playing field and results in wider political participation. And so it played out – at least in the West for much of the twentieth century. But we are no longer in the industrial age, and according to Piketty, any belief that technological progress will lead to “the triumph of human capital over financial capital and real estate, capable managers over fat cat stockholders”, is “largely illusory”.²⁶

The sad truth is that technological progress, which in former times promoted higher output, higher wages and greater equality, is now working in the opposite direction in all these respects.

This is a large part of the cause of what has gone wrong with the American Dream, indeed, with the liberal promise in general. Clearly, neither in America nor in Europe has it proved true that “mass education levels the playing field and results in wider political participation”, or consequently that economic growth reduces the “income disparity between rich and poor”. In America there has been mass education for some considerable time; now up to 40 percent of young people attend university or some tertiary institution of training. But all that this higher education guarantees most graduates is high levels of debt to pay off; it does not ensure that they will all hold jobs commensurate with their level of education; most will in fact occupy positions for which degrees were never required at all and are all but otiose, as the work of Peter Murphy and other educationalists demonstrates.²⁷ A population of over-educated and over-qualified people who hold lowly jobs or are unemployed generates great social dissatisfaction, which might in time have serious consequences.

What counts in America now is not the mere fact that a person has gone to university or received an education, as used to be the case before mass

²⁶ Ibid, 112.

²⁷ See Peter Murphy, *Universities and the Innovation Economy: The Creative Wasteland of Post-Industrial Societies* (London: Ashgate Press, 2015).

education, but rather the status or prestige of the particular university attended. And that depends very much in the first place on money to be able to afford the high fees, in the second place on the inherited kudos of one's family background, and only in the third place on one's actual scholastic aptitude; which is itself closely tied up with the first two factors, as private secondary schools and extra coaching can be bought or gained through connections. Thus, the elite universities are beyond the reach of most Americans regardless of their abilities; as Richard Reeves, the author of a book whose main thesis is that the upper class hoards opportunities, states: "For most people outside the elite, these institutions might as well be on the moon ... money buys opportunity in America."²⁸ Reflecting on the recent scandal in buying admission to elite universities through all kinds of underhand means, *The Times* reporter Gerard Baker concludes as follows:

But the story has bigger social and cultural resonance. It underscores how far the country has come from its egalitarian ideals. The truth is that a lot of US higher education is a racket.²⁹

How has it come to this? How is it possible that education which was believed to be the great leveller has instead morphed into the great divider?

Education was the great panacea held out by liberal reformers ever since the early nineteenth century for bringing about a more egalitarian society. When he extended the franchise to the working class, the reformist conservative Prime Minister in Britain, Disraeli, declared "we must educate our masters". The Prussian "Iron" Chancellor, Bismarck, had already realized that a mass army required mass education. With much more egalitarian motives, the philosophers Mill in Britain and later Dewey in America urged for educational opportunities up to the highest levels for everyone able to take advantage of avenues for self-improvement. Most later thinkers and statesmen followed suit, both in America and Europe. Hence the ever-greater proliferation of schools and universities, with America, because of its wealth, always in the lead in establishing educational institutions at all levels. After the Second World War, in particular, huge sums amounting to a considerable proportion of state revenue were spent on education.

²⁸ Richard Reeves, *Dream Hoarders: How the American Upper Middle Class is Leaving Everyone Else in the Dust, Why That Is a Problem and What to Do about It* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2018), 15.

²⁹ Gerard Baker, *The Times*, reprinted in *The Australian*, 15, April, 2019.

But the overall effect of all this money and effort as far as equality is concerned has been paradoxically retrograde. This has not only been the case in America but in Britain as well, which might have been expected from its traditional class structure, but more surprisingly it has also occurred in republican France and elsewhere on the continent. In Britain according to a recent book by Lee Elliot Major and Stephen Machin:

Every effort to increase social mobility through education has largely failed as the well-off find ways to stay further ahead.³⁰

Once again, in America as elsewhere, the upper classes defend their privileged status by hoarding opportunities for themselves and their children and denying these opportunities to groups lower down the social hierarchy. In Britain, education is paradoxically the main means for maintaining class superiority since the traditional educational ladder of “public” schools and Oxbridge lends itself very easily to this purpose. There has recently appeared a spate of books on this subject.

In France the situation is more complicated, but according to Piketty, the great proportion of funding from state sources goes to the elite schools and universities, which are dominated by the children of the two upper quasi-castes that he calls left Brahmins and merchant right, or Baniyas, if one sticks to Piketty’s Hindu caste terminology. These two groups that stand in a complementary relation to each other, have risen to the top of the social system since the rise of credentialism and financial capitalism began in the period of privatization in the 1980s. By various means – generally involving the inheritance of what Bourdieu calls cultural capital – these two elites have succeeded in monopolizing for their children the places reserved at the top institutions. In fact, he shows that in America there is a clear correlation between parental earning, the proportion of its children who go on to university and the type and status standing of the universities they attend.³¹

According to Piketty, the present social system in advanced capitalist societies has returned close to the vast inequalities of before the First World War, and even in some respects to the medieval system of estates:

At bottom, the Brahmin left and the merchant right embody two different forms of legitimacy. Indeed, this system of dual elites in a sense

30 Lee Elliot Major and Stephen Machin, *Social Mobility and its Enemies* (London: Pelican Books, 2018), 14.

31 Thomas Piketty, *Capitalism and Ideology*, op. cit, Chapter 1.

represents a return to the deep logic of premodern trifunctional society based on power sharing between intellectual and warrior elites, except that the warriors have been replaced by merchants (because security of goods and persons is now assured by the centralized state).³²

In other words, we have entered a quasi-caste system where the Banias, upper caste merchants, have replaced the Kshatriya warriors and rulers. Any pretence to a meritocratic class system where mobility is possible must now be abandoned as mere hypocritical liberal pretence, such as that practiced by the Chicago school economists we previously discussed.

Democratic politics has also not led to any narrowing of class differences. The main reason for that outcome is that in America political power and success in elections is also closely bound up with money. It has become more pronounced during the course of the twentieth century that politics in general is for the wealthy. To win any kind of election in America requires money; and the higher and more important the seat, the more of it is needed to have a chance of succeeding. Short of the presidency itself, the most expensive elections are for the Federal Senate. Money for this is either provided by the candidate out of personal fortune, or, as is more usually the case, by rich backers, who will naturally require returns for their investment in the form of support for themselves and their interests. Hence policies which go against the interests of the very rich have, therefore, little chance of succeeding. This is the main reason that a social democratic government, such as those common in Europe, has never been elected in America; and, in fact, a social democratic party with any degree of popular support has never existed in America. Hence, one cannot expect any far-reaching egalitarian measures to emerge from the US Congress; these generally come from the presidency and from the judiciary.

There has been a very different outcome in Europe where social democratic parties did win power and instituted ameliorative legislation to improve the lot of the poor in significant respects. These measures constitute the Welfare State reforms that after the Second World War took similar forms throughout Western Europe. In Britain the Labour Government brought in many of the welfare institutions, such as universal health care and other such benefits that still do not exist in America. To pay for these provisions very high-income tax rates and also inheritance levies for a while were introduced, higher than any that the American wealthy would tolerate. And, indeed, for a time after the war income differentials were less in Britain than in America. This was so until the

32 Ibid, 773.

British economy began to stagnate in the 1970s and was completely privatized by Thatcher in the 1980s; since then, Britain has been subject to extensive globalization, which benefited the rich rather than the poor, who have considerably grown in number and proportionately.

Thus, the British class system remained intact and unshaken despite the Welfare State and for a time the genuine equalization it brought about. Again, one of the main reasons for this is the education system based on an elite of so-called “public” schools and the independent Oxbridge colleges linked closely to these schools. As fees at these schools grew ever higher, so they became more and more the preserve of the aristocracy and the upper bourgeoisie. These elite universities tend to favour the applicants from these classes as they frequently are the children of “old boys” and “old girls”, that is, former alumni. This situation of class privilege is bound to persist in Britain as any thought of abolishing or even seriously reforming this educational system to make it act as the class elevator taking people to the top is out of consideration at present as it is politically untenable. To what extent this education-based class system is responsible for Britain's decline as a nation, as claimed by Robert Verkaik and other authors, is beyond the scope of our investigation.³³

The liberal capitalist societies that have made the most drastic inroads into class inequality have been the Scandinavian ones. In these countries long-serving social democratic governments have produced a more egalitarian society than anywhere else at present. At the same time, highly efficient and prosperous capitalist economies have developed, starting off from very low levels a century ago; in the nineteenth century these were poor countries and some of them barely independent. But in a relatively brief period they have grown highly prosperous and at the same time egalitarian. This is where the liberal dream has been realized, but only by implementing quasi-socialist policies which have resulted in a cradle to grave welfare state safety net that makes equal provision for everyone.

One of the outstanding features of this system has been an extraordinarily effective state controlled and managed education system. Teachers in schools are motivated because they are well trained and paid good salaries. They still command a high degree of respect from their pupils and the community at large. Consequently, even upper-class and rich parents have not found it necessary to establish a separate private school system alternative to state schools. Since the same educational standards prevail in all schools, this means that

33 See Robert Verkaik, *Posh Boys: How the English Public Schools Ruin Britain* (London: One World Publications, 2013).

both rich and poor go to school together, which makes for an egalitarian spirit throughout the society. In any case, in a more egalitarian society there is less anxiety for parents that their children must do well at school to get into elite universities; and universities are themselves not much differentiated. Everyone is much more relaxed about education which makes for better education in the long run.

It is possible that the Scandinavian success in achieving an enviable level of egalitarianism is due to unique factors peculiar to these societies. They are characterized by strong fraternal ties, as they are very cohesive societies, each with its own national consciousness. But they are also bound together by a common history, culture and language; with the partial exception of Finland where Swedish is spoken as well as Finnish. This means that the rich can tolerate levels of taxation far higher than their counterparts in other societies are ready to bear elsewhere. It is almost inconceivable that the American rich would ever allow themselves to be taxed to that degree. So, it is likely that the secret of Scandinavian success lies in an espousal of neither liberalism nor socialism, but something more akin to nationalism, though of a particularly non-aggressive variety. This is the reason that the Scandinavian example is unlikely to be repeated elsewhere.

Thus far we have focussed on meritocracy in so far as it concerns class and status, the classical socialist parameters, but there are also issues of meritocracy that concern gender and race. The struggle for equality by women in all Western societies has also been waged since the French Revolution. Mary Wollstonecraft lived through the revolution in Paris; she wrote *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) in reply to Burke's attack; and as a logical sequel *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). For her the equality of men and the equality of women were inextricably bound up with each other. She has since been considered the founding philosopher of the feminist movement.

What Wollstonecraft first initiated has now been achieved in some Western societies. Women in Europe and America have made huge advances over the last century in gaining equality with men. And the struggle goes on, as feminists are demanding not just equality of opportunity in gaining positions and jobs, but an actual equality of outcome, arguing that as close as possible to half of all appointments should be filled by women. To that end, they are proposing that quotas be established mandating that a certain fixed percentage of positions in any given line of work should be reserved for women regardless of other considerations.

The struggle for racial equality has taken a similar turn as blacks and their supporters complain of being inadequately represented in certain lines of work or of not receiving enough rewards of a certain type. Thus, for example,

in Hollywood black actors and directors point to the paucity of Oscars being awarded to them. Despite such complaints, justified or not as they may be, it cannot be denied that in America blacks have done well in filling positions of high standing from the Presidency down. To that extent racial equality has been attained; though that discounts the situation for the poor blacks in the ghettos. Some thinkers maintain that the latter is the crucial issue, not the former which mainly affects middle class blacks who have already made it.

All such tendencies towards meritocratic equality for women and minorities, such as the blacks, will no doubt continue. But do these make up for the glaring and ever-growing discrepancies in income and wealth? It is no doubt consoling for poor blacks to know that one of them has become president and that a growing number are attaining wealth and high positions. But that does not alter their situation in the least. It will be the same for poor women when a woman becomes president and more women become company directors, or for women and blacks now that a black woman has become vice-President. The contest to attain high positions mainly concerns contenders who have already made it to the upper class or whose parents have done so, all others have little chance. Hence, achieving gender or racial equality at that level does not in any significant way improve the condition of most of those, women or blacks, lower down, and does nothing for the ones on the bottom. For all of those, the crucial inequality remains that of wealth and class. One does not have to be a Marxist to hold that this is the inequality that really matters in a capitalist society.

In a liberal capitalist society, it is not just enough to have equality of opportunity in the formal sense, this must also correspond at least to some degree with equality in outcomes. If the outcome results in huge disparities in income and wealth, then the presumed equality of opportunity counts for little to those on the bottom. It is not enough to say, as McCloskey does, that they should be content with "enough" or sufficient to get by in having their material needs met. For what does it mean to have "enough" if people lose all hope for the future and give up trying to better themselves because they know it will not get them anywhere? The Roman proletariat could be propitiated and held in check by bread and circuses. Will something like that, basic pay and television, be "enough" for the American proletariat? But it is doubtful whether the American masses will give up on the American Dream as easily as that, they are bound to demand something of its realization. Furthermore, they have the democratic vote in their hands, which the Roman poor only partly held during the Republic and effectively lost during the Empire. How will poor Americans use their democratic power?

It is possible to conceive many likely outcomes, but which one will in fact eventuate is unpredictable. The American electorate, that is, those that any longer bother to vote, could elect leaders who will turn America around in a social democratic direction akin to those which have already taken place with mixed results in Europe. But this is unlikely given the capacity of the upper classes to select candidates to their liking. It is much more likely that American politics will stagnate and American society degenerate to greater inequality. America might turn into a caste-bound society with little prospect of mobility for the vast majority of people. People born into a class will simply accept that as their station in life. For this seems to be in general the way the world is going, and the still huge disparities between liberal capitalism in the West and despotic capitalism in the East are being narrowed.

If this outcome were to eventuate, it would be a betrayal of Western ideals as these have descended to us from the ancient Greeks, not to speak of politics since the French Revolution. To give up on a striving for equality would be to surrender one of the founding principles of Western politics, established at the very start in the Greek polis. Liberty without the counteracting balance of equality and fraternity produces the politics of the marketplace where votes are bought by perfectly legal means, where winners take all and losers get nothing. Where the ballot-box alone determines who wins, then those who have the means to manipulate voters will win every time. In such a situation, money buys power. To avoid such a predicament and remain true to itself, the West cannot afford to give up on the striving for equality, it must remain an inalienable ideal of our politics. But it must not be taken as an absolute at the expense of other fundamental values, liberty and fraternity above all.

This is the problem with Piketty's approach to this issue. He treats the question of equality from a characteristically internationalist and globalist point of view that socialists have tended to adopt right from the very start; he advocates what he calls "participatory socialism and social federalism".³⁴ His aim is not only to achieve egalitarian outcomes for people within the one country, but also for countries within the one bloc, such as the EU, and for continents themselves, such as for the EU and the African Union, ultimately he aims for equality throughout the whole world. Clearly this emerges as something of a utopian project. What makes it implausible is that he has totally overlooked fraternity. If anything, his approach is counter to any regard for fraternity, for his comprehensive internationalist stand is hostile to any value being placed on identity and cultural commonality.

34 Thomas Piketty, *Capitalism and Ideology*, op. cit, 774.

In general, he is utterly indifferent to *cultural* differences. The word itself hardly figures in his theoretical lexicon and does not even occur in the index of his book. Culture, it seems, does not matter. The word identity is similarly regarded and invariably taken in a negative sense as synonymous with identitarian ideology. His definition of identity speaks of it as purely an ideology:

An identitarian ideology is an ideology structure around an identification with a specific social group, often based on ethnic, racial or religious identity.³⁵

Piketty can see nothing positive in identity, and neither does it matter in his scheme of things. He treats it invariably in a pejorative way as standing counter to equality. Thus, he speaks derisively of the “postcolonial identitarian trap” into which the whole world seems to be falling. Frequently he is right in his dismissal of the new forms of nationalism, but not altogether, since the assertion of national identity has also something to be said for it.

Obviously, in the French context, as in that of Europe in general, the term “identitarian” has strong pejorative connotations, since it is associated with the anti-immigrant and chauvinistic nationalist policies of the National Front, a party founded by the racist Jean-Marie Le Pen, though somewhat modified and moderated by his daughter Marine Le Pen. Going by this precedent, Piketty has fallen in with the idea that identity *per se* makes for identitarian politics of this ilk. He does not take identity as a neutral term which can take both good and bad forms, depending on one’s value judgements, of course. Nor does he grasp that identity in a political context is closely related to fraternity, namely, it depends on who one fraternizes with in a quite literal sense. One’s political identity is determined by the groups one belongs to and with which one shares a common culture in terms of values and empathies. Many people’s identity is shaped by multiple groups, some even in contradiction with each other. Identity is not a simple matter.

In this more embracing and evaluatively neutral sense identity and fraternity cannot be discounted or eliminated from politics. By adopting a socialist universal stance, especially in respect of the crucial issue of inequality, Piketty attempts to do just that. This has been a problem for socialism, with its “Internationale” cosmopolitan emphases, right from the very start. When Marx declared “workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains”, he did not realize that the workers of the world did have something to lose

35 Ibid, 1043.

besides their chains – their identities. They could unite and make common cause on many issues, especially economic one, but there were many others on which they were irreconcilably divided, and in the last resort these were the ones that mattered. For they were not just workers in the economic sense either, but also Frenchmen or Germans, Protestants or Catholics, Christians or Jews, and so on for many other crucial differences that marked their identities. The idea of becoming purely nondescript internationalist proletarians did not appeal to them as much as to cosmopolitan intellectuals, such as Marx and Engels, or those such as Piketty at present.

Piketty assumes a far too all-embracing sense of universalist solidarity which is unlikely to be subscribed to except by a minority of intellectuals and high-minded ideologues. This is what lends many of his proposals a utopian idealist aura and makes them unrealizable in the real world of politics. He more or less suspects as much, but nevertheless thinks that such goals must be affirmed as standards for what to aim for in the future. Thus, he strives for a world without borders or national citizenship which would make it possible for anyone from anywhere to choose to live anywhere else and expect the same rights and entitlements as the natives. These are clearly unrealizable goals and at present far from desirable. Abolishing borders in order to achieve them would have very disruptive consequences as it would lead to ethnic strife and potentially to civil wars. Whether it would ever be possible to have one world devoid of states or citizenship requirements is a purely hypothetical matter for a far distant future. It is certainly not something we should be aiming for now. Many of Piketty's proposals have this kind of utopian ring about them, fortunately not all, for some are very sensible indeed, especially those dealing with taxation matters.

What we have argued concerning identity also holds for fraternity, for it is the way in which political identity is affirmed. Since the French Revolution fraternity has generally been taken as referring to nationalism; but as we have seen from our previous discussion, it can be seen as operating also in other ways in different political contexts. In the ancient polis of Greece or Rome it meant the sense of community with fellow citizens and their joint devotion to the *patria*, which was the basis of their identity as Spartans or Athenians or Romans. It was somewhat similar with medieval patriotism, especially in Italy where people identified themselves as Florentines or Venetians; and which still has echoes in current *campanilismo* politics. Later, following the French Revolution, there came a new sense of fraternity embracing the whole nation, or nationalism as it is now called, such that, for example, the members of all the cities in the land of Italy identified themselves as Italians. This new sense of identity was invoked and reinforced when movements formed in the struggle

to gain national independence and constitute a nation-state. Italy was no longer a mere geographical expression, as Metternich termed it, but became a political state and a new kind of community. It was the same for Germany and for all the other nation-states of Europe where nationalism flourished.

With the formation of the European Union the issue of fraternity took another, a still higher turn, and the issue arose whether the people of Europe could come to transcend narrow nationalism in favour of a broader European identity. This is still an open question to which there is as yet no conclusive answer. It is an on-going process in which there have been advances and retreats. It has also had paradoxical outcomes, for the more people came to identify themselves as European, the more they tended to rediscover their pre-nationalistic roots in local origins, which were largely repressed during the formation of nation-states. Thus, some Britons came to identify themselves as Scots or Welsh, as opposed to English, some Iberians felt that they are far more Catalans than Spaniards, some people in France became Bretons or Corsicans rather than Frenchmen, and so on. In Italy *campanilismo* is once more in the ascendency and the *Lega Nord* is one of its political expressions.

Thus, at present in Europe there are three types of fraternity vying for supremacy: that of the European Union, that of the old localities, and that of a reignited nationalism. The latter is that which provoked Brexit in Britain. Such belated nationalism or localism might be looked on as regressive by committed Europeanists like Piketty, but they must be understood as protests against the etiolated sense of a colourless identity that being merely European offers. If there is already so much disgruntlement with being European, then the prospect of becoming cosmopolitan leaves most people cold. But this is what Piketty and the global federalists have to overcome if their proposals are to have any reality.

Fraternity and Nationalism

1 German Nationalism

The warmth of brotherhood. *Fraternité*. Obviously, it took the genius of Dostoevsky to understand that this was *fraternité ou le mort*. Dostoevsky foresaw what *fraternité* is capable of turning into. In materials on Auschwitz, I came across a little verse from the ss song: “Und willst du nicht mein Bruder sein, so schlag ich dir den Schädel ein” (And if you don’t want my Brotherhood, I’ll smash your skull and smash it good) ... *Fraternité ou la mort* – it all starts with fraternité.¹

This quotation from Alexander Wat’s memoir *My Century* encapsulates much of what took place during the century of the European catastrophe. Wat, a Polish-Jewish poet, suffered most at the hands of the Russian Bolsheviks, but his family perished at those of the German Nazis. In the last chapter we dealt with the Bolsheviks, in this chapter we shall be concerned with the Nazis. In these highest reaches of malevolence, the differences between them are almost immaterial since both were a matter of *fraternité ou la mort*.

How do we get from Schiller’s “Alle Menschen seien Brüder” to the ss ditty “Und willst du nicht mein Bruder sein ...”? Getting from the one to the other is the long and twisted story of *fraternité*. It is, in fact, the history of nationalism, especially as this unfolded in Germany in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For what began with the hopeful words of the “Ode to Joy”, later set to music by Beethoven and now sung by all Europeans as their hymn of unity, ended up with a different tune, with the ss song of murder. Nationalism was the inspiration behind both these melodies, but it was not the same kind of music; it had altered beyond recognition. What brought about this variation on a common theme? The answer concerns a crucial aspect of the modern history of Germany, that of German nationalism, as well as the history of the downfall of Europe which resulted from it.

It cannot be denied that German nationalism was a very positive development in the history of Europe; during the nineteenth century it was also so for

1 Alexander Wat, *My Century: The Odyssey of a Polish Intellectual*, trans. Richard Lourie, with a foreword by Czeslaw Milosz (New York: Norton, 1933), 151.

every other nationalism. Nationalism brought many backward societies that had slumbered in historical darkness into the light of history and woke them from their somnolent peasant traditionalism. Languages that never had a literature acquired one. Nationalist impulses coursed through all the arts, nowhere more so than in Eastern Europe, but elsewhere as well wherever the national or local culture asserted itself and assumed its own identity. All this nationalist stirring produced one of the great cultural ages in European civilization.

During the nineteenth century and down to the First World War Western civilization stood at one of its high points. This was the period of the triumph of the bourgeoisie, and much of what they accomplished was carried out in the name of nationalism. In most parts of Europe, the struggle for the formation of nation-states from the French Revolution onwards was the occasion for many of the great cultural achievements. The German battle against Napoleonic occupation gave rise to the modern university system inaugurated with the foundation of the University of Berlin in 1806. The later struggle for German unification gave rise to much of its music, such as the operas of Weber and Wagner. Something similar is true for Italian *Risorgimento* and the operas of Verdi, whose name became an acronym for Italian independence. National emulation played a major role in the development of science in France, Germany and Britain, especially the keen competition between the first two after the Franco-Prussian war. Nationalist styles in the arts were everywhere current, especially in Eastern Europe and Russia. The Russian novel, above all those of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, is inconceivable apart from nationalist sentiment. Once nation-states were established, they competed in introducing progressive policies in education, health, labour relations, pensions and so on.

However, it is also true that all this nationalist competition in the political and military sphere led directly to the tragic disaster of the First World War. This war and its sequel the Second World War have given nationalism a bad name in retrospect, for aggravated nationalism was responsible for what happened. Towards the end of the nineteenth century nationalism began to develop dangerous tendencies, amongst which racism was the worst. And together with this racism loomed the spectre of anti-Semitism which was to have such horrendous consequences.

In this chapter we shall mainly be concerned with this dark side of German nationalism. It is a historical irony of the highest degree that this most civilized of nations in Europe should have contributed most to the destruction of European civilization. For, indeed, in so many respects the Germans were European leaders; but at the same time, they harboured unresolved complexes and contradictions that made them the most aggressive nation in Europe.

Where that aggression led Europe learned to its cost when it was too late to do anything about it.

To explain the disastrous consequences that flowed from fraternity we must examine the political side of nationalism. Politically nationalism was crucial for Europe in that it created the nation-state, a political entity that defined itself on the basis of a national territory inhabited by the people of the one nation who predominated within it; a people who shared a common language, history and destiny, and who frequently considered themselves a race. On this basis new states were established where there were none before, the two of the greatest importance were Germany and Italy. Other nations everywhere clamoured for independence and were the most disruptive forces throughout the largely peaceful nineteenth century. Even long-established states transformed themselves in the light of the prevailing nationalism. Eventually in the twentieth century countries outside Europe, deriving from other civilizations, were forced to conform to this model of nationalism and to establish their own nation-states. Japan was perhaps the first non-European nation to do so, if we discount Russia as an even earlier example, for Russia is in many respects European.

Nationalism promoted economic development and general modernization. In the first place, this was because industry was required to serve the needs of the military forces of nation-states; and secondly, because economic activity was conducive to the well-being of the nation in every other way. To further develop industry and the military, most states undertook mass education and literacy campaigns in the national language, in some case creating a common comprehensible language for the very first time where previously there had been a large variety of mutually incomprehensible dialects. Literacy was, of course, the prerequisite for every other kind of modernization and industrialization. Nations without a state of their own generally remained in a backward colonial condition, as the Poles and the Irish so bitterly complained, causing them to fight valiantly for independence.

Nowhere was nationalism more successful than in Germany where from a vast array of large and small principalities – some, such as Prussia, already a great power, others, such as Weimar, no more than a small provincial town, together with free cities, bishoprics and other assorted medieval entities – gradually throughout the nineteenth century a state was piece by piece assembled. This became the *Reich* under Prussian tutelage, the first ever ‘united states’ in Germany, save for the ramshackle medieval Holy Roman Empire. This nation-state rapidly became the most important in Europe in every significant respect. It was also the most powerful in Europe, and its actions determined the fate of Europe.

German nationalism was the most impressive and consequential of all the European nationalisms. It began in a blaze of glory as a direct response to the call for *fraternité* stemming from the French Revolution. It ended in a blaze of fire as Hitler's Third Reich burned amidst the ruins of Berlin. In between these two termini, German nationalism created and celebrated the achievements of the German Reich. And there was much to celebrate as it was directly or indirectly responsible for some of Europe's greatest feats during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, it not only led Germany to ruin but also brought about the destruction of a large part of the rest of Europe and the eventual ruination of European civilization. How all this took place is perhaps best depicted by the great German novelist Thomas Mann in his work *Doctor Faustus*.

Clearly, German nationalism was both the most creative and most destructive of all the nascent nationalisms of Europe that started with the French Revolution. This event in France had its most shattering repercussions in Germany across the Rhine among the numerous states of the decrepit Holy Roman Empire, which by this stage, as Voltaire remarked, was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire. Within the repressive and claustrophobic atmosphere of the Old Regime, the revolutionary clarion call made most impression on the young *Dichter und Denker* of an already ongoing German artistic and intellectual revival. These young men took the French call for fraternity literally as one for the universal brotherhood of all men. It was in this spirit that the young Schiller penned his "Ode to Joy". At the same time the trio of young philosophers, Schelling, Hegel and Hölderlin, danced around the tree of liberty.

But it did not take the Germans too long to discover subsequently during the Napoleonic occupation that the French idea of *fraternité* did not entitle them to be placed on an equal footing with Frenchmen. Fraternity did not prove to be as universal in practice as it was proclaimed to be in theory. It was an ideal that the French kept for themselves for they alone were the "enfants de la patrie" as their national hymn, the *Marseillaise*, stated; the others had to put up with that as best they could whatever their own national feelings.

Before too long the Germans gave their response, first enunciated by the philosopher Fichte in his *Address to the German Nation* of 1806. According to Fichte the Germans, too, were a nation every bit as good as the French; and in fact, in respect of language and race they were superior to the French and every other nation. For they alone were a people of pure Aryan descent who spoke an uncontaminated language closely akin to ancient Greek, the original language of civilization and culture. Thus, the seeds were laid for the most virulent nationalism of all, as we shall see. The Germans began to see themselves as a Chosen People whose main rivals were the other Chosen People, the Jews,

who would have to be dealt with, as Fichte already prophesied, in anticipation of Hitler.

However, in the short run, in the course of its history it was all to the good. The movement of national liberation ensued which drove out the French and defeated Napoleon. But to the chagrin of the new German nationalists, it did not lead to the unification of Germany. It only led to the aggrandizement of Prussia and Austria. Under the instigation of Metternich, the Old Regime returned once again in an even more repressive form than before. Nevertheless, German artistic and intellectual achievements continued, particularly in Prussia. The University of Berlin, a new foundation expressly aimed as a counter to French influence, proved to be the model of a research university that all the world went on subsequently to imitate. German philosophy with Hegel in Berlin at its head would dominate Europe from then on till it came to its end when Hitler exiled or dismissed all philosophers who would not toe the Nazi line. It was the same with science which also flourished in Berlin, and was second to none in Europe, especially after the Reich was established; but it came to a premature decline when Einstein and all the other Jewish scientists as well as all others opposed to the Nazis were driven out of Germany.

With unification and the foundation of the second Reich, Germany became the leading military power in Europe. But its superiority did not manifest itself actively as long as Bismarck was in charge. However, when Wilhelm II, a blustering and incompetent leader, took on the reins of power, his aggressive instincts soon revealed themselves. A general European war was just a matter of time as the two sides squared off: on the one side stood the Central Powers, Germany and Austria-Hungary, on the other side the Allied Powers, France, Russia and England. The First World War, which accidentally broke out in August 1914, was the initial disaster for Europe from which flowed all its other misfortunes. Given how bad these proved to be, in retrospect it might be speculated that it would have been better all-round if Germany had won: better a Europe under Prussian hegemony than a Europe ravaged by Hitler and Stalin.

Hitler's Nazism was the final most perverse and perverted form of German nationalism. The echoes of the initial claim made by Fichte to linguistic, racial and cultural superiority were to sound ever louder until they drowned out every other voice with Hitler's brazen shout that the Germans were the *Herrenvolk* and "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles" was sung as an assertion of German supremacy, rather than what it was initially intended, as a call for unity above all else for the sake of the nation. Racism was turned in the first place against the Jews, before it was also directed against the Slavs, who occupied the territories that Hitler claimed as *Lebensraum* in the forthcoming *Drang Nach Osten*. Mass extermination of these supposedly inferior races became the simplest

and most expedient means of clearing the ground for German occupation. For the Jews total extermination was envisaged as the Final Solution.

The naïve but nevertheless baffling question is always being asked: how could the nation of *Dichter und Denker*, the culturally most advanced nation in Europe in so many respects, have succumbed so unresistingly to the blandishments of Nazism? What must be realized first of all in tackling this issue is that Nazi ideology was far from sheer nonsense in the German context, no matter how much it might seem so in the context of another country and culture, such as Britain or America. In the setting of German intellectual and political culture it did, indeed, make sense, and was persuasive since so many of Germany's best minds espoused it. How this was possible we shall endeavour to explain in what follows.

As for the mass of Germans, there are simpler ways of accounting for why so many succumbed to Nazism. What is often pointed to is the distress in which the German nation found itself during and after the First World War. The Germans suffered more from the privations of war due to the British naval blockade than their enemies did due to submarine warfare. After the war ended, their sufferings did not end. First there was the catastrophic inflation of the early 1920s, and then the even worse Great Depression of the early 1930s. Hitler promised to be the saviour who would rescue Germans from their misery. And for a time in the 1930s he fulfilled that promise, which won him so many hearts and minds and brought them over to his side.

All this is true, but it cannot be the whole explanation for what happened. Economic and political arguments only go so far and do not plumb the deeper causes. It so happens that the people of faraway Australia, loyal sons of the British empire who fought in the war, lost, in proportion to their population, as many men as Germany; and later during the Great Depression, they suffered as high an unemployment rate as Germany. Yet there was nobody like Hitler in Australia and no attempt was made to overthrow the established democratic government. Clearly something deeper and more sinister was present in Germany that was absent in Australia and other democratic societies.

According to Thomas Mann, as expounded in his war-time speeches and in his novel *Doctor Faustus*, what was crucial in Germany's fall were cultural factors. It was the bourgeois cultural elite and its intelligentsia that entered into a Faustian pact with the Devil of Nazism and suffered the inevitable consequences. This is not just a novelistic flight of poetic fancy, but must be taken seriously as a sociological explanation. For the deepest roots of Nazism lie in German culture, that is, in the German conception of it as *Kultur* which is opposed to *Zivilization*. In German thought *Kultur* always takes priority and is more important than politics or economics, or even morals. This was already

evident from early on, as Mann notes when he quotes Wagner's words in 1845 in his earliest sketch for *The Mastersingers*:

Though Holy Roman Empire sink to dust,
There still survives our sacred German art.²

When finally completed in 1868 this opera was a celebration of German art and German nationalism, culminating in the cruel exposure and expulsion of the Jew. It must not be forgotten that the great admirer of Wagner, Hitler, considered himself primarily an artist. In an essay published in 1939 Mann ironically eulogised him as a brother artist – “a rather unpleasant and mortifying brother.”³ Wolf Lepenies notes that Mann did not consider Hitler and the Nazis as a foreign influence in Germany, but as essentially German:

Not only was Hitler more representative of his country than the world had originally thought. Not only did even a likeable observer come to detect, in the dreadful Nazi physiognomy, familiar German features. With Thomas Mann, a great artist took Hitler's artistic claims seriously.⁴

In this respect Nazism differs crucially from Bolshevism, for Nazism did not have to be imposed on Germans by authoritarian fiat as a foreign ideology, whereas Bolshevism had to be imposed on Russians by force and indoctrination. Germans accepted Nazism as part of their own cultural tradition, willingly or unwillingly as the case may be. By contrast, the vast majority of Russians rejected Bolshevism as inimical to their traditions, religion and culture. Hence, Bolshevism had to be forced on them by brutal, unyielding and unending terror. Nazism required no such drastic measures; even though the concentration camps were set up to deal with the minority of recalcitrants, together with the Jews. Nazi ideology lay deeply ensconced in *Kultur*. There is hardly an element in it, including its anti-Semitism, that did not have a long-standing precedent in *Kultur*. It is one of the great and sad ironies of history that the Jews, those ardent lovers of German *Kultur*, were the ones who suffered more than any others from its moral failures.

2 Thomas Mann, “Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner”, in *Essays by Thomas Mann*, trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), 248.

3 Wolf Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 45.

4 *Ibid*, 45.

The German bourgeoisie was wedded to this *Kultur* because it constituted the *Bildung* which they so cherished. *Bildung* was the compensation they received for relinquishing political power, which they handed over to the Prussian Junkers and the military caste of officers. As long as they could get their *Bildung* – from the state-endowed and controlled universities, by far the best in the world, and the equally excellent orchestras, operas, theatres, galleries, museums and all other cultural institutions – they remained content. The Prussian jackboot did not crush them; it merely kicked them aside from the sphere of politics where real power lay. But this had extremely dangerous consequences in the sphere of morality, as Lepenies brings out:

But the illusory overrating of culture thus played a particularly dangerous role in German history. When culture was accepted as a substitute for politics, the absence of morality in the public sphere was easily accepted as well. The aesthetic appeal first of fascism and later of National Socialism was not a superficial phenomenon. Addressing it must be a core aspect of any attempt to explain the attractiveness of Nazi ideology for a large segment of the German bourgeoisie and many German artists and intellectuals.⁵

As Lepenies points out, a moral vacuum formed itself in the very heart of *Kultur*, which could easily be filled by ideology. Both politics and culture were bereft of moral standards, especially as the former was focussed on military power and the latter on music, the speechless art. The politicians, cast in the mould of Bismarck, were only intent on *Realpolitik*; and the militarists, in the spirit of Clausewitz, were only interested in strategies for victory. The culture-vultures, on the other hand, took music as their primary art to which all other arts must aspire, and music makes no moral demands. The great musical artist of the age, Wagner, did not take moral issues seriously, he was only interested in an aesthetic revolution that would bring to birth a new liberation of humanity, of which the German *Volksgemeinschaft* was to be the precursor.

Hitler played up to both sides of this national dichotomy. He gave the generals what they asked for – unlimited armaments and manpower to launch wars in which they were able to excel themselves and gain glory as they went from victory to victory. He gave the professors and intellectuals all the *Bildung* they craved and promised more, much more, after the final victory. Berlin, as rebuilt

⁵ Ibid, 47.

by Albert Speer, his master architect, would become the cultural capital of the world, and the Germans would enjoy unheard of cultural wonders in the arts and in all spheres of intellect. Many German intellectuals accepted such empty promises as heralding a cultural revolution that would save Western civilization from going under, as Spengler had prophesied. Heidegger saw it as a new dawn of Being, Germany's "great and solemn dawn". He, too, was little interested in morality or law. In his rectoral address in 1933 he said, "The Führer, and only the Führer, is Germany's sole reality and law, today and in the future". Instead of morality he was only intent on authenticity, and Hitler was certainly authentic enough for him, as he judged by the shape of his hands. When his then friend Karl Jaspers chided him with following an uneducated ignoramus like Hitler, he replied: "Education is itself not all that important. Just look at Hitler's hands, at his marvellous hands."

The full implications of Hitler being "Germany's sole reality and law", a view also upheld by Carl Schmitt, the Nazi legal philosopher, was made fully apparent barely a year later when Hitler, together with an SS execution squad, personally participated in the arrest and assassination of his former comrade-in-arms the SA leader Ernst Röhm and many others, such as Georg Strasser and anyone else he feared or disliked. Hitler boasted about it in a *Reichstag* speech claiming he had saved Germany – from what he did not specify but merely dropped dark hints. In fact, it was done to appease the military. But it was generally accepted by the German people, and Carl Schmitt defended Hitler's action as the assertion of the Führer's sovereign will that stood above the Law. This was the initial moral Rubicon that Hitler and the German people crossed on the way to utter immorality and illegality. For even though there had been desultory murders perpetrated by SA thugs instigated by Göring when the Nazis came to power, these were hushed up and not openly trumpeted as giving them the right to murder whoever they chose at any time. This is, in effect, what Hitler claimed for himself, and it was the beginning of the German moral catastrophe.

The key to the German catastrophe is inherent in *Kultur*, the basic premise of German nationalism. It was because of their *Kultur* that Germans felt superior to every other nation in Europe. It was on account of this *Kultur* that they felt justified in attacking other nations of supposedly inferior status. For *Kultur* was an end in itself, since it was the highest attainment of which mankind was capable. Hence in order to understand German fraternity, their nationalism and their sense of national mission, we must interrogate this peculiar German notion of *Kultur*.

2 The Birth of Nazism from the Spirit of Classicism

The Slavs could become Germans, just as barbarians could become Roman citizens, but the higher culture, *Kultur* itself, could only be German, as it had once been Greco-Roman ... To this German universalism ... there is linked a great phase of European civilization, the intensity of a *Kultur* which combined in itself the tension between life and value, between existence and order ... [However] when German supremacy is threatened, this universalism can get twisted into the most chauvinistic barbarities.⁶

The term *Kultur* is a peculiarly German concept that has no exact equivalent in any other language. It had been adapted to stand for the uniquely German cultural developments since the mid-eighteenth century such as Claudio Magris is alluding to in the above quotation. In contradistinction to *Kultur* there stands the term *Zivilization*, which though obviously derived from the generally used word "civilization" has received a somewhat negative slant in German, since it was applied to its Western foreign neighbours and competitors, first France and then Britain. As Magris also intimates, *Kultur* could be deployed for aggressive purposes to stand for German superiority. As the Germans themselves put it, it led from *Dichter und Denker* to *Richter und Henker* (from poets and thinkers to judges and executioners), that is, roughly put, from Herder and Hegel to Heidegger and Hitler.

To understand this German notion of *Kultur* and grasp its hidden nationalist potential, which could so easily become aggressive, we must spell out three binary oppositions: that of *Kultur-Zivilization*, that of Classic-Romantic, and a third, Aryan-Semite, which is frequently, though by no means always, linked to the previous two. Apart from the first, which is uniquely German, the latter two are commonly found also in other European conceptual vocabularies. However, even these receive a particularly German slant when used in a German context.

The *Kultur-Zivilization* couplet, as Norbert Elias explains, arose in the second half of the eighteenth century due to the cultural climate and class structure of Germany at the time.⁷ A new generation of *littérateurs* and poets, generally of bourgeois background, launched a cultural revolution against the prevailing influences stemming from France, which the nobility espoused. The

6 Claudio Magris, *Danube*, trans. Patrick Creagh (Collins: London, 1989), 32.

7 Norbert Elias, "Sociogenesis of the Antithesis between *Kultur* and *Zivilization*", *The Civilizing Process*, Vol. 1, trans. E. Jephcott (Pantheon, New York, 1982).

latter aped the neo-Classical and Rococo styles of French court culture, which the Germans dubbed *Zivilization*. The rebels against what they considered aristocratic chivalrous play called their own more autochthonous and authentic culture *Kultur*, believing it to have the German virtues of *Innerlichkeit* (inwardness) and *Geist* (soul) as opposed to the mere externals of manners and good taste. This pitted the young Goethe and Herder against Gottsched and Frederick the Great, the previous *arbiter elegantiarum*.

At first this dispute was all very civil and even Kant took part, siding with *Kultur* against *Zivilization*. However, later during the war of natural liberation against the French occupying forces of Napoleon, the opposition assumed a decidedly nationalistic cast. In Fichte's rousing *Address to the German Nation* of 1808 the Germans were singled out for the uniqueness of their *Kultur* which gave them cultural superiority over all other nations. This theme was to feature markedly in many other German thinkers and artists. It was re-echoed in the subsequent movement for national unification leading to the foundation of the *Reich*. As we shall show, in the hands of Wagner and the young Nietzsche it assumed the ominous form of a defensive self-assertion. So much so that the Germans fought the First World War in the name of *Kultur* as against the *Zivilization* of the Latins and Anglo-Saxons. No lesser voices than those of Thomas Mann and Oswald Spengler joined the patriotic chorus of intellectuals in defence of *Kultur*. Goebbels' propaganda machine repeated the same message during the Second World War.

The Classic-Romantic polarity arose as a diremption within *Kultur* between its two conflicting tendencies. Both sides were attempts at historicist retrievals of long-lost cultural traditions. The Classicist sought for a re-evocation of a largely imaginary Attic artistic paradigm that figured in their minds as the original cultural utopia. The Romantics aspired to a revival of the Gothic Christian culture of the Middle Ages, which at least was closer in time and still survived in architectural monuments and in religion and popular folk lore. These were the two initial historicist backward projections which in time would be repeated with respect to other periods and even other civilizations, eventually ending up in the twentieth century with attempts at revivals of the archaic and primitive.

To begin with, most German *Dichter und Denker* were Classicists and Romantics at once. They went through alternate periods of the one then the other, as, for example, *Sturm und Drang* was followed by Weimar Classicism; or they went from the one style to the other in different works; or both were combined in the one work, as Goethe accomplished in *Faust*, where the fusion of Classicism and Romanticism was symbolized by the marriage of Helen

and Faust. Schiller's work, too, went through analogous alternations. Thus, Classicism and Romanticism were two sides of the one coin of *Kultur*.

Classicism and Romanticism were not, however, unique to Germany but figured in the cultures of the other European nations, though not as distinctly and decisively as in *Kultur*. This took a somewhat different form in each, though there were also strong currents of cross-cultural influences generally flowing from Germany. Thus, for example, the French Classicists in the latter part of the eighteenth century chose Roman models, rather than Greek ones. The paintings of David featured the legendary heroes of Rome; and the Revolutionary rhetoric and literature revived the Republican virtues, that is, until Napoleon made himself emperor and then the Roman Augustan styles came into fashion. Romanticism did not arrive in France till much later during the Restoration, imported by Madame de Staël from Germany.

The English took a more practical attitude to the classical heritage. They actually went to Greece and recovered the ruined statuary, as most notably Lord Elgin brought back the sculpted friezes from the Parthenon. The Germans with their more ideal vision of Greece refused to go and see the real thing even when they had the opportunity to do so. Not until the late nineteenth century did Schliemann go there and begin digging things up. Among the English poets, Byron not only went to Greece but gave his life for its liberation, much to the consternation of Goethe. He, like the other so-called Romantic poets, Shelley and Keats, was a Classicist as much as a Romantic. Shelley was a Platonist who wrote *Prometheus Unbound* and Keats wrote *Endymion* and "Ode to a Grecian Urn". The contrast between Keats and Hölderlin reveals the differences in attitude of the English and Germans to the classical world.

A similar contrast is to be seen in the Aryan-Semite opposition which played such a large role in the racist thinking of the nineteenth century. This arose from a genuine discovery in philology made by Sir William Jones and delivered in a paper to the Asian Society of Bengal in 1786. He found that there is a close kinship in vocabulary and grammar between European, Persian, Indian and other so-called Aryan language families, as, for example, between Sanskrit, Old Persian, Greek, Latin, German and the Celtic and Slavic languages. The British did not make much of this philological fact for reasons we have elsewhere explained.⁸ However, to the Germans it was a revelation eagerly taken up by Friedrich Schlegel, Franz Bopp and many others. The reason for this is that they took the philological kinship of languages for a commonality of race and thereby they believed themselves to come closer to the ancient Greeks. Only

⁸ See Harry Redner, *Totalitarianism, Globalization, Colonialism*, op. cit.

much later did it become more evident that Aryan is a linguistic not a racial category; though as yet few in Germany were able to understand or willing to accept the view expressed by Max Müller lecturing at Oxford: “the Science of Language and the science of Man cannot be kept too much asunder ... it would be wrong to speak of Aryan blood as of dolichocephalic grammar.”⁹

Alongside the idea of an Aryan or Caucasian race, named after the presumed origin of the original Aryan people, there arose the complementary idea of a Semitic race. In the European context, it was not the Arabs but the Jews who were labelled accordingly. Hence, once Jew-hatred was placed on a racial basis it gave rise to anti-Semitism. We now know, and genetic evidence has confirmed it, that the idea of the Jews as a race is as mistaken as that of the Aryan language-speakers as a race. Unfortunately, in the racist context of the nineteenth century everything positive was ascribed to the Aryans and everything negative to the Semites, or really Jews.

In what follows we shall not attempt to deal more exhaustively with the three basic binary dualities of *Kultur-Zivilization*, Classic-Romanic and Aryan-Semite for a whole book would be necessary to do so. We shall merely concentrate on an aspect of *Kultur* that we have designated as Classicism. This is closely allied to Aryanism and anti-Semitism though it is not necessarily bound up with it. However, it is so in most of the later exponents of Classicism starting with Fichte, continuing with Wagner and ending with Heidegger.

Wagner assumes a central role in Classicism, literally so for he stands midway between its origin in Weimar and its end in Hitler’s chancellery built by Albert Speer in Berlin. The Wagnerian opera house located in Bayreuth was the intermediary between the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem* of this epochal development. Wagner is undoubtedly a great composer and a very competent dramatist and poet, but it is not as artist that we shall consider him but as intellectual and ideologue. He began in this role during the 1848 Revolution when he stood beside Bakunin in Dresden, on the same side as Marx and Engels. These Leftist revolutionaries had much in common for they were all followers of Feuerbach a Left-Hegelian, and all evinced early symptoms of anti-Semitism. However, their paths diverged drastically after the failure of the Revolution. The others went to the far-Left, either Communism or Anarchism, whereas Wagner drifted in the opposite direction to the far-Right becoming first an extreme nationalist and eventually a proto-Fascist.

It is true that, unlike Marx or Bakunin, Wagner did not establish a political party or revolutionary movement but he did create an aesthetic movement

9 Max Müller, *Biographies of Words and Home of the Aryans* (London: Longman Green, 1888).

which was to have profound political consequences. He might be considered the founder of the aesthetic politics out of which Nazism developed. In building his theatre in Bayreuth and in launching publications and Wagner societies, he and later his wife Cosima laid the foundations of ultra-nationalist and eventually anti-Semitic parties among which the Nazis were only the most extreme. As Roberts states:

A direct line leads from Bayreuth to the Third Reich prepared by the politicization and nationalization of Wagner's religion of humanity. The Bayreuth Festival soon came to be seen as a sacred national site, Wagner's art as religion, and that religion as that of the nation: "the accomplishment of the Aryan Mystery of Bayreuth".¹⁰

It is one of the most tragic ironies of history that Jews, with Wagner's encouragement, played a large role in establishing the Wagner cult, despite his evident anti-Semitism.

The road from Wagner to Hitler is a relatively straight forward and direct one, it has been amply surveyed by Joachim Köhler in his book *Wagner's Hitler*.¹¹ It goes through people such as Houston Steward Chamberlain, Wagner's future son-in-law, Dietrich Eckhardt and Alfred Rosenberg, Hitler's mentors, to Hitler himself an ardent Wagnerite. Wagner's teachings provided these and many other of so-called conservative revolutionaries with two fundamental premises which can be termed in German *Antisemitismus* and *Kulturpessimismus*. The first is self-explanatory; the second, based on the key notion of *Kultur*, I have already partly accounted for, but it requires further exposition.

Kulturpessimismus means that ever since the perfection of the Greeks *Kultur* has been falling into an ever-deepening decadence. This began already with Euripides and Socrates in Athens at the close of the Hellenic "tragic age", and continued accelerating ever faster downwards. The *Zivilization* of the multi-racial Hellenistic age and the Roman Empire were the first milestones in this decline. The Judeo-Christian religion brought it down even further. During the nineteenth century the egalitarian trends stemming from the French Revolution and British commercialism and capitalism threatened to degrade it to absolute nullity, which Nietzsche called Nihilism. Only German *Kultur* stood in the way of complete cultural devastation. But Wagner's own new art of the

10 David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism*, (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 116.

11 Joachim Köhler, *Wagner's Hitler: Der Prophet und sein Vollstrecken* (München: Karl Blessing Verlag, 1997).

Gesamtkunstwerk, namely his music dramas, promised salvation through a re-enactment of Greek tragedy in a new form, and with it a refoundation of *Kultur* for Germany and for the whole of humanity.

All that threatened this inviting prospect was race-mixing, a loss of the purity of Aryan blood, which the Germans had preserved better than any other nation. This was due to the inroads of assimilated Jews and their growing tendency to miscegenate, which must be prevented at all cost. The Jews should be segregated and if possible expelled so that they would cease to cause any further racial pollution. This is what Wagner dramatically enacts in his jolly German comedy *Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.

Antisemitismus and *Kulturpessimismus* became the mainstay of German conservative revolutionary thinkers who followed Wagner, beginning with the young Nietzsche in his first book whose title encapsulates the whole Wagnerian scheme of things. This ideology became particularly prominent after the First World War for Spengler's book *The Decline of the West* gave it apparent scholarly respectability and gained it currency among the intellectual public. Many German philosophers, above all Heidegger and Wittgenstein, took up where Spengler left off, as we have shown in a previous publication.¹² We shall return to some of these thinkers presently after we have first explained how the dialectics of Classicism worked itself out in Wagner and his predecessors.

It all began with a Classical revival in the mid-eighteenth century, which, as already mentioned, took an idiosyncratic and unusual form in Germany very different from those in the other European countries. Firstly, because for the very first time it was a Hellenic revival that excluded the Romans; and secondly, because it evinced a peculiar intensity of self-identification with the ancient Greeks that eventually verged on self-delusion or even mania. Perhaps this was due to the belated nature of the Renaissance in Germany.

The original Renaissance in Italy largely passed by Germany as it was pre-empted there by the Reformation. Luther, its initiator and main exponent, was hostile to what he took to be the pagan influences coming from Rome. A century later the Thirty Years religious wars reinforced this hostility among the Protestants. When humanistic and artistic culture began to recover in Germany, it did so under the aegis of French Augustan Neo-Classical fashions coming from Versailles, which every local German ruler, both grand and petty, sought to imitate. During the eighteenth century this was termed the *Zivilization* against which the exponents of *Kultur* rebelled. Instead of the

12 Harry Redner, *The Tragedy of European Civilization: Towards an Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New Brunswick: Transaction Press, 2015).

Latinate culture of Rome, they went further back to its more authentic origins in Athens. Instead of imitating the imitators they would emulate the original themselves.

Just as Blake sought to build Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land, so the German *Dichter und Denker*, sought to recreate Athens in Weimar, situating it spiritually as far away from Jerusalem as their nominal Christianity allowed. What they in fact established went through at least three distinct moments in Hegel's sense. It begins as simple and naïve Grecophilia or Philhellenism; in the second stage this develops into a much more fraught and delusive Grecomania; and in the third stage this turns into a full blown Grecogermania as it becomes nationalistic and aggressive. In accordance with Hegel's conception of the dialectic, the earlier stages are *aufgehoben* or sublated in the later ones.

It begins with the Grecophilic thesis of love and admiration for the ancient Greeks and the desire to imitate them. Despite the fact that both geographically and historically the Germans were further removed from Greece than almost any other European nation – they had next to no classical ruins for example – they came to believe themselves to be closer by language and race than any other people. Hence, they developed a special affinity for the ancient Greeks, while remaining utterly indifferent to the modern ones. This led them to the delusion that they could become like the ancient Greeks and identify themselves with them, which brought on the next stage of Grecomania. This was eccentric but harmless as long as it remained in the ideal domain of art and thought. However, when it took a practical and political turn in the attempt to transform Germany into a modern reincarnation of Greece then it became dangerous. For the German nationalists came to believe that they could not only reconstitute the Reich but invest it with the qualities of the polis, which they took to be a *Volksgemeinschaft*. Because of their evident kinship with the Greeks, they alone of all the European nations had the capacity and will to recreate the Greek achievement in Germany. This was when Grecogermania ensued. They set about building a capital, Berlin, in the classical style. The culmination of this was to have been a capital for all of Europe of gigantesque classical proportions to be called Germania, which Hitler and Speer would erect after the victorious war. Fortunately, it was not to be.

Winckelmann started it all off with a book published in 1775, *Thoughts on the Imitation of the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks*. It needs to be said that he never saw any real Greek paintings and few Greek sculptures apart from inferior Roman copies. One of the few was the Hellenistic masterpiece the Laocoon which he interpreting in his own idealistic way. This set off an intense debate in Germany as Lessing disputed this interpretation in his book *Laocoon*

of 1766. From then on what was taken to be Hellenic Classicism became all the rage in German artistic and literary circles. Many undoubtedly great works, such as Goethe's play in imitation of Euripides, *Iphigenia auf Tauris*, and Schiller's heathenish poem "The gods of Greece" emerged from it. But Goethe was wise to concentrate his energies on the German Romantic *Faust*, rather than on a Homeric style epic or the odyssean drama *Nausicaa* on which he desultorily worked at various times in his career. Schiller, too, did not persevere with Classicism though he paid it due regard in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* of 1795. This was the highpoint of Grecophilia.

Grecomania ensued when Hölderlin, who had fallen under Schiller's spell, thought that he could not merely poetically evoke the gods of Greece but bring them down to earth to dwell in Germany. Neither Schiller nor Goethe could take this seriously since for them Greece was an ideal not a reality; they laughed at Hölderlin behind his back. However, his two school mates, Hegel and Schelling, were on his side at this stage. In their joint declaration, called "The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism", published in the appropriately named Jena journal *Athenäum* in 1800, they outlined a political aesthetic based on Hellenic harmony, which Roberts summarized as follows:

The state with its constitutions, government, law and priesthood is a machine, which must give way to the organic community, united in and through the idea that combines all the ideas – the idea of beauty. The highest unifying act of reason is accordingly an aesthetic act, which synthesized truth and goodness and beauty. From this highest act flows the necessity for the philosophy of the spirit to become aesthetic, thereby completing philosophy through the restoration of poetry to its original dignity as the teacher of humanity ...¹³

Schelling reiterated this idea of a philosophy of art to be realized through a conception of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in anticipation of Wagner:

Let me just observe that the most perfect combination of all the arts, the union of poetry and music through song, of poetry and painting through dance, and they in turn synthesized, provides the most composed theatrical phenomenon, such as the ancient drama was, of which there remains for us only a caricature, the opera, which in a higher and nobler

13 David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art*, op. cit, 21.

style, as regards poetry and other competing arts, would be most likely to lead us back to the performance of the old drama with music and song.¹⁴

Schelling maintained his belief in art and mythology even after Hölderlin's insanity. But Hegel distanced himself from such rampant Grecomania in his later work which took a much more rational developmental course.

To what extent Grecomania was responsible for Hölderlin's real mania can perhaps be gauged from the view of his career, expressed by a simple carpenter called Zimmer: on being asked what drove the poet mad he commented "it is nothing but enthusiasm for those blasted heathens that sent him off his head."¹⁵ There is more than a grain of truth in this explanation, for as E.M. Butler puts it, "he began to believe in his mission as a prophet of the returning gods ..."¹⁶ He tried to reconcile this with his own and Germany's Christianity and came up with the ingenious identification of Christ with Dionysus, both gods of bread and wine. Poetically this is wonderful, a little like Blake's visionary classical renditions of mythology, but intellectually it is threadbare.

Hölderlin is undoubtedly an inspired poet. His poems were almost lost and largely rediscovered by Stefan George and his literary *Kreis* of Grecomaniacs. These were still harmless dreamers, though one of their dreams of a third *Reich* and a coming *Führer* would be realized in a nightmarish way. Hölderlin's poems would also be utilized for nefarious political purposes, as when Heidegger much later latched onto them and gave them a Nazi spin. What with titles like "Germania", "Rhine" and "Ister" (Danube), the sacred German rivers, it seemed as if Grecogermania was already at hand, though Hölderlin was most probably looking back to Tacitus rather than forward to Hitler, as Heidegger contends. We shall return to Heidegger's Hölderlin interpretations later.

Hegel did not entertain such Grecomaniac dreams of poetry and art for very long. As Roberts asserts, "between 'The Oldest Systematic Program' and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel reversed his estimation of Greek religion and Christianity and placed the beautiful religion of the Greeks in the historical perspective of the progression of the absolute spirit. Beauty must yield its privilege as the highest act of reason to philosophy."¹⁷ Nevertheless, something of his old Grecomania returned in his Aesthetics or philosophy of art. His ideal of perfect beauty and artistic perfection always remained Greek art. Considered purely as art, the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles and the sculptures of

14 Quoted in Roberts, *The Total Work of Art*, *ibid*, 44.

15 E.M. Butler, *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 238.

16 *Ibid*, 228.

17 David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art*, *op. cit*, 50.

Phidias and Praxiteles were unsurpassable. But that did not mean that art stopped with the Greeks. Hegel does allow that after Classicism there came Romanticism, which is what he called Christian art.

Hegel took the Classic-Romantic opposition of his own time and anachronistically projected it backwards onto the history of art. As with everything else, he adopted a dialectical or developmental approach to art. First there came the Symbolic art of the Orientals, then there was the Classical art of the Greeks, and finally the history of art concludes with the Romantic art of the Germans. Perfection or ideal beauty lies in the middle with Classical art. Symbolic art is deficient and faulty reflecting the monstrous gods of Egyptian, Hindu and Chinese religion. Christian art moves beyond the sphere of the aesthetic altogether, that of more sensuous appearance, to represent the spiritual truths of the highest religion. Its art has the “beauty of inwardness”. Only the gods of Greece in human shape express the ideal unity and harmony of the religion of beauty of a polis society, where art, religion and politics are perfectly in accordance with each other. As Hegel puts it:

It is thus that Classical Art constitutes the absolutely perfect representation of the ideal, the final completeness of the realm of Beauty. There neither is nor can be anything more beautiful.¹⁸

Unlike Hölderlin, by this stage Hegel is fully aware that such perfection is irrecoverable, that the gods of Greece cannot be brought back. But there is a compensation in that with the loss of perfect art the Spirit can enter the higher realms of religion and philosophy – which is what Hegel meant by the end of art.

With Hegel Grecomania remains, but it is restricted to art. But in his rival Idealists, Fichte and Schopenhauer, Grecomania takes a further turn to the extreme and turns into the much more nationalistic Grecogermania. The hatred of Jews that both of these distinguished philosophers evince is an anticipation of the coming anti-Semitism that usually accompanies Grecogermania.

This became first apparent in Fichte's *Address to the German Nation* on the eve of the war of liberation in which some of the main themes of Grecogermania are sounded, though not as yet as well developed as they would become in Wagner's music of ideas. Nevertheless, a beginning was made when

¹⁸ Hegel, G.W.F., *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Part 3, trans. B. Bosanquet (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1921).

Fichte sought to divorce Christianity from its traditional relation to Judaism, as Donatella di Cesare reports:

... identifying Christianity as a natural religion, Fichte placed in doubt the concept that Jesus was a Jew, and condemned Saint Paul for having “injected” into Christianity elements of Judaism that prepared the way for the “ruin of Christianity”. In his *Address to the German Nation* Fichte accused Christianity, which had “originated in Asia”, of having become “properly Asiatic”. Here, for the first time, there emerged the disquieting idea of an Aryan Christ; Fichte spoke of an “original Christianity” that was authentic and pure. He justified the right of Germans to reclaim their original Christianity and their duty to Aryanize it, translating it into a political mission.¹⁹

Little wonder that Fichte became Hitler’s favourite philosopher. It was not just that Fichte hated Jews, but that in distancing Germans from Jews he thought he was bringing them closer to the pagan Greeks, in a move that many other Grecogermaniacs would repeat after him. How this took place throughout the nineteenth century is explained by John Deathridge:

In a nationalist corner of German Idealism, Fichte posited a united Germany as an *à priori* category in his *Address to the German Nation* (1808) and presented German as the only remaining primordial language in touch with nature. Here, too, Fichte’s model was the supposed purity of Greek culture, in particular its roots in a “natural” congruence of language and nation and – for nationalists of Fichte’s generation, at any rate – its unblemished racial character. The heady influence of Fichte’s ideas on German thought and practice in the nineteenth century, incidentally, is perhaps the reason that the issue of language and nation, in which Wagner played a not insignificant role, and for which classical studies provided a formidable example, gradually came to be defined in terms of ethnic categories rather than the broader agenda of Schiller’s and Humboldt’s liberal humanism.²⁰

19 Donatella di Cesare, *Heidegger and the Jews, The Black Notebooks*, trans. Murtha Baca (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2018), 32.

20 John Deathridge, *Wagner beyond Good and Evil* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 2008), 105.

Deathridge's account maps clearly the route from Grecophilia to GrecoGermania passing through Grecomania. His statement concerning Wagner is borne out by the whole content of his book. He is quite definite that "... from the beginning of his career Wagner was enthralled by the idea of the Greeks as the pristine source of a lost culture – an ideal of fundamental origins projected into the utopian future of a society encumbered by alienated living and a lack of spiritual freedom."²¹ It was this utopian future that Hitler, Wagner's great admirer, sought to realize in practice.

3 Wagner, Nietzsche and Heidegger

Wagner has not perhaps received sufficient recognition as a great conservative revolutionary thinker of the far-Right, almost on par with Marx and Bakunin on the far-Left. His fame as an artist has somewhat overshadowed that as a political ideologue. But art and politics are one for the GrecoGermaniacs. His aesthetic-political essays that preceded the composition of the *Ring* and the other later operas cannot be divorced from these musical compositions. As David Roberts's book makes clear, Wagner's conception of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the total work of art, is also the anticipation of a future utopian totalitarian politics.

The Greeks are the key to these ideas. Wagner's project is to recreate the Greek origin in Germany both in art and politics at once: to create a new art form that would serve as a model for a new rejuvenated society of the German people, a *Volksgemeinschaft* such as supposedly Athens had once been. Resurrecting the ancient Greeks in the course of a modern national rebirth would infuse the old spirit into a new body in a process of cultural reincarnation. Thus, the Germans will reach across the gulf of the ages to their own precursors, bypassing and ignoring everything that had occurred in the intervening times, above all the detested Jewish religion, Christianity. Thus, the Germanic gods modelled on their Greek originals would walk on stage as well as in the corridors of power, as Roberts notes:

The return to the sacred origins of theatre, to the Greek *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the Greek art religion amounted to the end of the history of

21 Deathridge's thesis is seconded by Simon Goldhill who writes that "Wagner's Hellenism and his anti-Semitism are integrally connected". See *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity: Art, Opera, Fiction and the Proclamation of Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 114.

European decadence – artistic, religious, political – since the downfall of Athens. Wagner's social myth of history, the myth of the loss of the regenerating power of myth, was strangely silent about the place of Christianity. Between Athens and the nineteenth century, Wagner registers, as Nietzsche in his wake, nothing but Socratic-Alexandrian enlightenment.²²

There was more than a touch of calculated prudence in Wagner's silence about Christianity; but he could not keep quiet about its detestable Jewish origins.

He called the Jew "the plastic demon of decomposition" and made him the surrogate target who stood in for the Christians whom Wagner dared not attack openly. Thus, the Jew assumed his age-old scapegoating role, though this time in the context of a modern racial anti-Semitism. For Wagner identifying with the Greek meant rejecting whatever was Jewish in the German. In time this would lead him to attempt to remake Christianity, so it is free of all its Jewish encumbrances – and so he composed *Parsifal*. Like Fichte before him, Wagner fell into a version of the old Marcionite heresy. Sacrilegiously he began to entertain the blasphemous idea that Jesus was fathered by a Roman, for only an Aryan could have sired such a historical prodigy, a view later popularized by Chamberlain.

Following the racial theory of Arthur Comte de Gobineau, whom he befriended in Rome in 1876, Wagner believed that everything worthwhile in civilization and human history in general was owing to the Aryans. Among the Aryans, the Germans were the most outstanding – next to the Greeks, of course. But a special kinship of language and race joined these two geographically and historically separated people. The Germans were destined to recover and repeat what the Greeks had achieved which had been lost in the long history of decline and decadence. Thus, the Origin would come back at the End of time to redeem Time.²³

The only threat to the fulfilment of this German destiny was race mixing, the great danger represented by the Jews living in the midst of Germany. The only solution to this problem was to isolate and if possible, expel these Asiatic interlopers. The Final Solution was not yet on the cards, though Wagner dropped occasional hints in that direction. In exceptional cases of rare Jews who were devoted and loyal Wagnerians, it might be possible to save such individuals by

22 David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art*, op. cit, 105.

23 Jacob Katz, *The Darker Side of Genius: Richard Wagner's Anti-Semitism* (University Press of New England, Hanover, 1986).

freeing them from the curse of their race so as to attain a true humanity. But as Jacob Katz shows, Wagner was not altogether consistent on this score.

Coming closer to the Greeks meant not only departing from the Jews but also distancing oneself from the Romans and their latter-day Latin descendants, the French and Italians. These were Aryans but of a mixed and therefore inferior species. For Wagner, this was of particular significance in music, the highest of all the arts, and explained why their music was inferior to German music and why the operas of their composers, especially those of the Jews among them like Meyerbeer, could not stand comparison with his music dramas. In fact, they were mere entertainment, a different and vastly inferior species of art. Only Germans are capable of producing true music in the sense of Schopenhauer's philosophy, which Wagner discovered in 1855. Only Wagner's music will fully measure up to the demands of his philosophy of music, as Deathridge summarizes it:

The guarantee of the Wagnerian Artwork of the Future is therefore three-fold: it will enable the individual through a heroic dramatic art based in part on the Greek ideal and borne on the wings of German music; it will stimulate the creation of a purified and hence unified culture of the kind once supposedly possessed by the Greeks; and it will guarantee to underwrite the integration of the German race, not with debilitating criticism or scientific reasoning, but with a mystical belief in the supremacy of the racially pure but as-yet-to-be-created German nation state.²⁴

This is what the young Nietzsche, his disciple, spelled out in his first book. What Wagner pronounced as *obiter dicta* in his endless monologues Nietzsche set down on paper, so much so that one might consider this book their joint production. Nietzsche implicitly acknowledges this in his fulsome dedication to Richard who gave it his blessing, and his wife Cosima her unstinting praise. The Wagner couple and the Wagner cult developing at Bayreuth threatened to swallow him up completely; which is perhaps the main reason why he had to break with Wagner if he was ever to find himself.

In his first published book all the elements of Grecogermania are better expressed than ever before. All that is missing is anti-Semitism, which he most probably excluded because it was inopportune for Wagner at this crucial moment in the building of the Bayreuth theatre when Wagner needed all the financial help from wherever he could get it, even Jewish money could not be

²⁴ John Deathridge, *Wagner beyond Good and Evil*, op. cit, 106.

scorned. Apart from that tactical omission, all the rest of the Grecogermaniac themes are sounded there, for as Nietzsche puts it, the future “promises a rebirth of tragedy and who knows what other fair hopes for Germany.”²⁵ We must not forget that the book was written during and immediately after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–71 in which Nietzsche took part, and as a consequence of which the *Reich* was founded. This event presaged fair hopes not only for Germany but for Wagner and his festivals at Bayreuth as well. The Latins had been defeated not only on the field of battle but also on stage where Italian and French operas had “divested music of its grand Dionysian meanings.”²⁶ But now, “out of the Dionysian recesses of the German soul has sprung a power which has nothing in common with the presuppositions of Socratic culture and which that culture can neither explain nor justify.”²⁷

What Nietzsche means by “Socratic culture” is the whole course of rational thought in philosophy and science since Athenian tragedy. Once philosophy and science took the place of myth that was the end of Dionysian culture. Later Nietzsche would call it Nihilism. However, there is a supreme remedy to this epochal decline of the ages and it lies in the music dramas of Wagner through which the ancient Greek tragic art will be reborn in a new German guise: “No one shall wither our faith in the immanent rebirth of Greek antiquity, for here alone do we see a hope for the rejuvenation and purification of the German spirit through the fire-magic of music.”²⁸ And, not coincidentally, with the rejuvenation of music comes the restoration of the German nation to its rightful political place, “for consider how inextricably bound up with one another are art and people, myth and custom, tragedy and commonwealth.”²⁹

Wagner placed all his hopes for succession on his adoptive foster son and presumptive intellectual heir, and so was bitterly disappointed when Nietzsche broke with him. He did not live to see it as Cosima cultivated a second successor in her son-in-law Chamberlain whose marriage to her daughter Eva she had arranged. Chamberlain collated and synthesized all the Grecogermaniac ideas from Wagner’s various scattered writings and issued them in two handy tomes in 1899 entitled *The Foundation of the Nineteenth Century*. In the Germany of Wilhelm II this became an instant best-seller for by this stage Grecogermaniac ideology had become commonplace in Germany and Germanophile circles

25 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, trans. Francis Golting (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 96.

26 Ibid, 119.

27 Ibid, 119.

28 Ibid, 122.

29 Ibid, 138.

throughout Europe. Chamberlain even gained the ear of the Kaiser himself as well as a little later, unbeknownst to him, that of a down-at-heel vagrant painter in Vienna. Much later when they met Chamberlain hailed him as "Germany's Saviour".

It is hardly necessary to read Chamberlain's book to know what it contains. It became the compulsory textbook in schools and universities once Hitler came to power. It profoundly influenced Hitler's mentors Dietrich Eckhardt and Alfred Rosenberg who wrote *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* along the same lines, a book Hitler could not publicly endorse because of the complaints it stirred up among the Catholics. But Chamberlain influenced a number of more respectable thinkers, among them Spengler and Heidegger, also the renegade Jew Otto Weininger who in turn played a key role in Wittgenstein's thinking. Thus, Greco-germanism became widespread throughout the German intellectual milieu and its sympathizers.

Chamberlain's marriage to Wagner's daughter Eva was highly symbolic of the drama of the Wagnerian legacy. Eva was named after the character in the *Meistersinger von Nürnberg* who is the prize offered to the winner in the music contest. She is the German bride-to-be and potential mother of the nation bearing the name of the mother of humankind. Hence, it is of critical importance to the nation that she does not fall into the hands of the Jew Beckmesser but is wedded and bedded by Walther von Stolzig, a proud and noble German. Hans Sachs, who stands in for Wagner in the play, is fully aware of what is at stake and makes sure through his interventions that the right outcome eventuates.

In this seemingly inconsequential, genial and quaint German comedy Wagner has in fact enciphered many of his cruel Greco-germanic ideas in code. To decipher them one has only to remember that this is a comic German version of Greek tragedy, a sort of satyr play. The musical contest in late medieval Nuremberg is a parody of the dramatic contest of the Dionysia in Athens; just as Nuremberg is a petty German version of a Greek polis. The chorus represents the people, as in Greek drama, and here the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The exposure of Beckmesser as a plagiarist and thief who has no musical ideas of his own is a symbolic rendering of Wagner's own strictures against Jewish composers and critics. Beckmesser's ridicule and expulsion from the Volk is thus an early premonition of what would eventually be done to the Jews in general.

The whole tragic history of Germans and Jews can be epitomized in five vignettes or views of Nuremberg. Firstly, there is the real town of Dürer and Sachs, a free city in the old Reich, which expelled its Jews. Secondly, there is Wagner's operatic Nuremberg, a fine *Gesamtkunstwerk* opera somewhat spoiled by its tendentious ending. Thirdly, there is the Nazi Nuremberg of the Party rallies, a joint political work of Hitler and Speer. Fourthly, there is Leni

Riefenstahl's film of the Nuremberg rally of 1934 utilizing all the resources of montage which she had learned from the Soviet Jew Eisenstein, who in turn had been inspired by Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Fifthly and finally, there is the Nuremberg of the Allied War Crimes Tribunal where a reckoning was made of the previous Nurembergs.

Wagner was, of course, not guilty of any crimes, though he was indirectly responsible for what ensued from his political influence. At the same time, it must be noted that he also had a profound artistic influence on the whole course of art in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Robert's work attests, he inspired a number of aesthetic movements, such as Symbolism and Expressionism, and his *Gesamtkunstwerk* idea had wide-ranging repercussions throughout all the arts. It is tragic to reflect that had he been a lesser artist his Grecogermaniac ideas might also have had a lesser impact in politics. But this is a counterfactual matter which it is notoriously difficult to establish.

With or without Wagner Grecogermania would have remained a potent force in German thought; though how Classicism would have played itself out is, of course, unpredictable. Apart from the usual suspects, such as Marxists, Positivists, Liberals and Progressivists in general, most German thinkers remained wedded to one or another version of Grecogermania. Another more unusual exception was Nietzsche after he broke with Wagner. He tried hard to distance himself from Grecogermania under the influence of his new friends, Paul Rhée, a Jew, and Lou Salomé, a Russian, with whom for a brief period he lived in a *ménage à trois*. He was not altogether successful; he did manage to disabuse himself of the Germania aspects but not of the Grecomaniac ones.

Despite this evident incongruity, the Nazis continued to treat him as one of their own and turned a blind eye to anything in his philosophy that went contrary to their ideology. The more honest among them, such as the philosopher Ernst Kriek, made a joke of this, as when he said that "Nietzsche was an opponent of socialism, he objected to nationalism, but apart from these tendencies he would have made an excellent Nazi." Such humour was too much for his rival within the Nazi academic establishment, Heidegger, who could not allow himself such merriment and continued to read Nietzsche as a good Grecogermaniac.

Interpreting Nietzsche has by now become a vast hermeneutic industry as almost everyone with a say has a view on this matter. Nietzsche could not overcome Classicism or the binary opposites that govern it: *Kultur-Zivilization*, Classic-Romantic and Aryan-Semite. Hence, no matter how critical he is of Wagner and his Grecogermania he could not free himself from its basic conceptual structure and this becomes more prominent the closer he comes to his mental breakdown in his last works.

Nietzsche still persists in identifying *Kultur* with the Hellenic Greeks and *Zivilization* with their Hellenistic and Roman successors. Accordingly, in subsequent European history *Kultur* only recurs briefly during the Renaissance; but with the Reformation it is *Zivilization* all the way, especially after the French Revolution; though another exceptional episode of *Kultur* is Weimar Classicism. In the battle between Classicism and Romanticism, Nietzsche stood on the side of the former, the latter he treated as decadence. He sought to assign Wagner the role of late Romantic decadent.

Nietzsche traces decadence into the very heart of Hellenic origins after what he calls the tragic age. Euripides in drama and Socrates in philosophy were already decadents. The metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle was even more so. Christianity, which he regarded as Platonism for the people, was decadent through and through, especially as it purveyed the Jewish slave-morality of meekness and turning the other cheek. A new master-morality is what the future must bring if there is to be any hope of overcoming Nihilism. This had reached its slough of despond during the late nineteenth century due to the levelling and equalizing tendencies of democracy, socialism, humanitarianism, feminism, and all the other so-called progressive movements. All we can do is wait for the barbarians, a new master race of the future. Even a cursory survey of his late works will substantiate these brief assertions. Is Nietzsche's madness, like Hölderlin's, also a case of Grecogermania turning into mania?

Heidegger, especially after he became a Nazi, largely followed Nietzsche and Hölderlin, though not into certifiable madness, except for one brief episode when he broke down soon after the war, for it looked as if he might be purged and stood down by the de-Nazification authorities. As a Nazi he was much more of a Grecogermaniac than either Nietzsche or Hölderlin, who were hardly that at all. But he interpreted them in these terms and made them available for consumption by the Nazis. He saw them as the German philosopher and German poet who stood above all others, except for himself, of course.

In his voluminous lectures on Nietzsche, he basically undertook an eschatological reading which fitted in with his own Grecogermaniac view of Western history and the history of philosophy. At the Origin were the pre-Socratic philosophers of the original age of Being. With the post-Socratics there ensued a Fall or fault when the ontological difference between Being and beings was forgotten and Being entered into the stage of self-concealment that is metaphysics. Metaphysics works itself out throughout the history of philosophy as a process of Decline, especially so after Descartes and the rise of modern science. This reaches its culmination in Nietzsche's Nihilism when technology encloses the world. Nietzsche marks the overturning of metaphysics but not its overcoming, for Nietzsche himself is the last of the metaphysicians who

stands at the end of metaphysics yet not beyond it. Only Heidegger can attain to a new dawn of Being, which will be a return of the Origin in the guise of a German revival simultaneously carried out by Hitler and the Nazi Party movement. That alone can save Europe and the West.

Heidegger's Grecogermania in philosophical form comes out even more in his reading of Hölderlin's poems which he undertook at various stages during the Nazi period. He held Hölderlin to be in some respects even higher than Nietzsche, as being a poet who was closer to Being and closer to the Origin in the Greeks and so the more German. As Emmanuel Faye comments on Heidegger's utilization of Hölderlin for political purposes: "In this respect, the course Heidegger dedicated for the first time to Hölderlin during the winter semester of 1934–5 is perhaps the most radically Nazi of all."³⁰ This course, addressed to the two poems *Germania* and *der Rhein*, has recently appeared after a long delay; it was obviously held back because it reveals too clearly Heidegger's blatant Nazism. Heidegger goes so far as to identify Being with Germany, as Faye notes:

Indeed, all the courses on *Germania* are directed toward the goal of identifying the German fatherland with being (*Seyn*), henceforth written with a y. Heidegger goes so far as to maintain, in underlining it, that "the 'fatherland' is being itself".³¹

According to this conception, it seems that there is no being in the true sense outside Germany.

All the doctrinaire features of Grecogermania are anachronistically read by Heidegger back into Hölderlin who was still largely innocent of such things. As Faye puts it:

Using Hölderlin as his springboard, Heidegger evokes "the German race" *das deutsche Geschlecht*, supposedly originating in the East, somewhere in the neighbourhood of a mythic Caucasia. Marking the "German race", Heidegger conceives of the Greeks as "a people of related race" (*ein stammverwandtes Volk*).³²

³⁰ Emmanuel Faye, *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy in the Light of the Unpublished Seminars 1933–5*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2009), 103.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

³² *Ibid.*, 171.

The Greeks stood at the Origin of Being and the Germans stand at its End, out of which will come a new Origin which will more than make up for all that was lost in the preceding period of the forgetfulness of Being.

According to di Cesare, Heidegger maintains that “only the German people were the custodians of Being, because, in the wake of Hölderlin, ‘someone who is German can in an originary new way poeticize Being and say Being’. This is why the German people had been awaited for so long on the stage of the history of the world ...”³³ For, according to Heidegger, “only the German people were entitled to go beyond metaphysics.”³⁴ In the notorious Black Notebooks it is plainly set down that the main protagonists of world history are the Greeks and the Germans: “Their place is established by the axis of Being, projected between the ‘first beginning’ inaugurated by the Greeks and the ‘other beginning’, the mission entrusted to the Germans”, as di Cesare paraphrases.³⁵ Between these two poles of the one “beginning” and the other there stretches out a long hiatus of empty time that is the history of metaphysics in which the Jews were complicit; “therefore, in order to recover from metaphysics – the sickness of the West – it was necessary to be cured of Judaism.”³⁶ According to di Cesare, Heidegger saw the Jew as the enemy of Being itself; the Jew “was an entity sundered from Being, who sought to make his own separateness universal, his own rootlessness planetary, forever impeding access to Being.”³⁷ Getting rid of the Jew was thus the aim of philosophy and the predestined task of the Germans. Solving the Seinsfrage could only be accomplished by solving the Judenfrage. Thus, the Final Solution was philosophically justified.

It goes without saying that opposition to Grecogermania and critique of Classicism of which it is the outcome does not entail the converse of its main premises or the negative of its conclusions. Of course, it is true that the Greek origin was of decisive importance to the whole history of the West and thereby also to the present history of the world. It is also true that German Grecophilia resulted in Weimar culture to which “there is linked a great phase of European civilization”, as the quote from Magris right at the very start affirms. German music in particular was second to none and Wagner’s operas are some of its culminating achievements. Nobody with the least historical awareness or sense is likely to dispute this, except sadly for those wedded to the latest shibboleths of political correctness and allied trends and fads in academia.

33 Donatella di Cesare, *Heidegger and the Jews*, op. cit, 81.

34 Ibid, 81.

35 Ibid, 80.

36 Ibid, 171.

37 Ibid, 171.

However, singling out the Greek origin does not mean that it was the only origin of the higher civilizations. Karl Jasper's thesis of the Axial Age – significantly published after the war as an implicit counter to Grecogermania – identifies at least four other crucial origins, the Israelite, Indian, Chinese and Persian. All these originary developments interacted with each other in the course of history, none remained isolated or pure, and out of these encounters came all the later civilizational achievements, such as Christianity and Buddhism in the sphere of religion or the foundations of modern science and technology, or the various great eclectic styles in the arts. It must not be assumed that what came at the origin is necessarily superior to what developed later; the original and authentic is not always the best.

Those who are confirmed Grecophiliacs can argue with some justification that the Greek origin was the most important, and this is certainly true as far as philosophy or democratic politics are concerned. But this must not be taken to Grecogermaniac conclusions such as are inherent in German Classicism. This does not preclude the espousal of the Classicist tradition. Under the general rubric of conserving culture that we have elsewhere advocated, it would be essential to maintain Classicism, but also Romanticism and the other major Western traditions.³⁸ And something similar holds for the other civilizations as well.

However, the unappeased ghost of the recently deceased Grecogermania is hovering around waiting to be reincarnated again. It is marching with the neo-Nazis on the streets, and in the academic corridors it has a potential following in the many neo-Heideggerians who have turned his philosophy into a respectable subject. Sad to say, Jews, such as Arendt and Derrida, have played a large role in this. Is the same sad story to repeat itself again?

4 The New Nationalisms in the World

Not only in Germany, but all over Europe and, indeed, all over the world nationalist sentiments are reasserting themselves. These were generally repressed after the Second World War, nowhere more so than in Germany. Following the catastrophic defeat into which Nazism led it, Germans even more than any others were intent on disavowing their nationalism. Germany was rent in two and each half sought to establish a new identity for itself as part of a larger

38 Harry Redner, *Beyond Civilization: Society, Culture and the Individual in the Age of Globalization* (New Brunswick: Transaction Press, 2013).

non-national whole. East Germany saw its fate as bound up with the Soviet Union and the nations of the Warsaw Pact Communist bloc. West Germany was just eager to merge its identity into NATO and the American alliance, as well as into a united Europe that joined it together with its former enemies of old, especially France and Britain. Both in the East and the West the Germans sought to divest themselves of any sense of uniqueness and peculiarity in nationhood or *Kultur* and merge with others in a common Communist or liberal-democratic universality. For almost half a century they seemed to be remarkably successful in doing so.

Then Communism collapsed and the East German regime along with it. The Germans finally attained their long wished for fulfilment as a unified nation and once again became the leading economic power in a united Europe. It seemed that what they could never achieve by force of arms, they had after all attained, at least in a limited way, by their productive capacity and the value of their currency. This sense of justifiable pride lasted for another thirty or so years after unification.

But as of late cracks have begun to appear in the façade of both German and European unity. The integration of East Germans into the West has not gone smoothly or been wholeheartedly accepted. The East under Communism never carried out the de-Nazification process that the West undertook and largely carried through. Hence, highly nationalistic stirrings of the Far-Right variety, even though not overtly Nazi, are making themselves felt in the former Eastern states. A new nationalistic anti-migration party, *Alternative für Deutschland*, draws most of its support from the former East. This must not be taken to mean that there is bound to be a Nazi revival in Germany, which is still most unlikely. But it does mean that nationalism is once again a force to be reckoned with in Germany as well as more widely in Europe and elsewhere.

Right wing parties with nationalistic agendas are coming to power all over Eastern Europe among the former Communist states. Hungary under Orban has gone furthest in this direction closely followed by Poland under the Law and Justice Party. Already both governments are beginning to infringe on the fundamental liberal democratic principles written into the constitution of the European Union. How far they will go in this direction depends on how intent these parties in power are on instituting themselves permanently in government and making it impossible for their competitors ever to win an election. One-party democracy is not something that the European Union could tolerate without breaking up.

In Western Europe similar nationalistic tendencies have emerged among the parties of the Far Right, such as that of *The National Front* in France and the *Liga di Nord* in Italy. Should either of these succeed in winning outright

power then this would spell the doom of the EU. It will have a much more profound and damaging effect than the exit of Britain. Britain was always a half-hearted member, choosing to retain its own currency and its close links with America. The Europeans can quite easily dispense with the British without feeling their own union threatened. This would not be so easy to overcome if Italy departed and would be catastrophic if France did. All in all, the rising tide of nationalism is once again threatening to drown Europe by plunging its nation-states into competitive bickering.

All over the world nationalisms of various kinds are coming to the fore. None of them is quite like European nationalism for they are not simply based on a difference of nations and nation-states but on much greater differences of religion, culture and past civilizational traditions. As we argued in Chapter 2, this will not bring on any wars of civilization according to the Huntington prediction, but it will lead to much greater tensions and animosities than the previous period of globalization would have led one to expect. Globalization is still in force for it is built into economic arrangements of production and trade around the world, as well as links in communication, technology and other cooperative arrangements that span the globe. But globalization has not weakened the power of nationalism.

The most dangerous form of nationalism at present is that emerging from the former imperial powers that have adopted despotic capitalism as their form of government; China, Russia, Iran and Turkey. Robert Kaplan comments on the dangers inherent in the two mightiest of these:

Both China and Russia have influence of increasing imperial dimensions, even as they weaken internally from economic stresses of a profound and structural kind. The very fragility of these highly centralized, Politburo-style regimes inside their own countries makes them increasingly aggressive beyond their borders, since nationalism can serve as a unifying element in times of social stress.³⁹

In speaking of the whole Eurasian world of which China and Russia are the key members, Kaplan goes on to note that “the surface of this world will be cosmopolitan, but with nationalism – as China and Russia demonstrate – still composing the bedrock.”⁴⁰ Unfortunately, Kaplan does not go on to specify what this kind of nationalism is like or how it is formed and constituted.

39 Robert D. Kaplan, *The Return of Marco Polo's World*, op. cit, 32–3.

40 Ibid, 33.

The nationalism of the inheritor-states of the old empires and civilizations is not like that of European nation-states. It does not just appeal to a national consciousness that is the further development of an older patriotism and strives for an independent and sovereign state. The nationalism of former imperial entities, such as Russia and China, looks back to an ancient history as a distinct civilization with its own traditions of culture, religion and ethnic ethos. According to Putin, Russia is not a nation-state but a civilization-state. This makes a big difference to how nationalism in such countries is viewed and endows it with a very different character from that of European nationalism.

Russian nationalism was always quite distinctive in tone and never quite chimed in with that of its European partners. Already from early in the nineteenth century Slavophilism arose in Russia and presented itself as more than just a form of nationalism. It assumed that Russia had a unique place and role in history; that it was not simply part of Europe but stood between it and Asia; that its religion was a purer and higher form of Christianity; and that it had a divine mission as the salvation of mankind from the devilish snares into which the West had fallen. Something along these lines is to be found in Dostoevsky's late novels, thankfully not as mere Slavophil propaganda but worked through in literary terms, which makes these works still highly readable.

With the Russian Revolution and the fall of Czarism, ideas of this kind only remained among Russian émigré writers and intellectuals. In Russia itself Marxist doctrine reigned supreme with its quite different view of human destiny and Russia's role in it. Stalin's conception of socialism in one state, however, gave Russia once more a central place in the new scheme of world history. It became the revolutionary leader of all other nations who must turn to it for guidance. The Chinese under Mao were not altogether accepting of this subservient position and tensions arose soon after Stalin's death, leading to an eventual split. For even though both shared Marxist ideology, neither was prepared to relinquish its status as a great power and distinct civilization. Hence, they vied for leadership of the international Communist movement and at one point almost came to war. Marxist internationalism could not expunge nationalism.

After the fall of Communism and the break-up of the Soviet Union, Russia became a smaller state of its own, no longer at the head of an empire; and for a brief period under Yeltsin, it looked as if it would accept its new status as simply a European-style nation-state. But under his successor Putin, it was soon clear that this was not to be. Putin was not prepared to relinquish Russia's old view of itself as a unique Christian and Eurasian civilization. He was supported in this view by the Russian Orthodox Church which had come back with full force as the guardian of the Russian soul. At the same time, secular intellectuals and

writers emerged who gave substance to the view that Russia belongs neither to the West nor the East, that it is the intermediate nation between Europe and China. Some of these referred themselves back historically to the formative nucleus of Russia as a state, the Muscovite principality that grew up under the aegis of the Mongols as an Oriental Despotism.

Such thinking appeals to Putin who is intent on hammering out a nationalistic ideology that would justify and legitimate his permanent reign as ruler for life and his taking into his own hands all the agencies of state, including the legal apparatus of justice. This amounts to his attempt at the institution of despotic capitalism. For this purpose, he has turned to three nationalistic ideologues whose ideas, beliefs and language have been prominently on display in his speeches almost since he first came to power in 2000. The first and earliest of these is Ivan Ilyin, a "White" Russian émigré in the West who lived in Berlin and died in exile in Switzerland in 1954, but was reburied by Putin in Russia in 2005. The second is Lev Gumilev, the son of the poets Nicolai Gumilev and Anna Akhmatova, who spent years in the Gulag and ended up as an academic in the 1960s and 1970s. The third is Alexander Dugin, who was born in 1962 and is still active, becoming in 2012 a leading thinker in Putin's brains trust; earlier he made contact and common cause with European neo-Nazis. According to Timothy Snyder, who provides a detailed account of all three, Dugin together with his acolytes Alexander Prokhanov and Sergei Glazyev "revived or remade Nazi ideas for Russian purposes".⁴¹ We shall rely on Snyder to outline some of these key ideas of all three of Putin's intellectual mentors.

Ilyin wrote his works in the 1920s and 1930s while resident in Berlin. He was much in favour with Mussolini and Hitler and sought to develop a fascist form of totalitarianism suitable for Russia. His ideas are of the typical Slavophil theological cast focused on Russian Orthodox Christianity and Russia's divine civilizing mission in the world. But to fulfil this role Russia requires a redeemer, a leader who "suppresses factuality, directs passion, and generates myth to order a violent attack upon a chosen enemy."⁴² In the first place this enemy is the Jews. But all of the West and Western civilization in general is the ultimate enemy for it seeks to corrupt Russia's innocent soul. Bolshevism is a Western plague that has infected Russia. Nevertheless, Ilyin approved the revolutionary violence of Lenin and Stalin. He had little regard for constitutionalism or for

41 Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* (London: The Bodley Head, 2018), 68.

42 *Ibid.*, 28.

democracy; “Ilyin rejected the rule of law in favour of arbitrariness – *proizvol* – of fascism.”⁴³

Ilyin’s ideas found favour among the oligarchs, men who rose to wealth and power following the break-up of the Soviet Union. According to Snyder, “Ilyin’s ideas served post-Soviet billionaires” because “an ideology such as Ilyin’s purports to explain why certain men have wealth and power in terms other than greed and ambition.”⁴⁴ Also, the oligarchs found his way of thinking congenial as it was also based on the Hegelianism in which they were steeped through their youthful education in Marxist-Leninism. Ilyin was a kind of Right Hegelian whereas Marx and Lenin were Left Hegelians. Ilyin’s ideas were particularly appealing to Putin because he saw himself as the redeeming leader who would bring Russia back to her true self, and to do so he needed to do away with constitutionalism, democracy and legalism, and all other corruptions of the West.

This is where Gumilev came in, for he argued that Russia was not a European nation at all, but a Eurasian one. Like other Eurasianists, Gumilev argued that Russia’s formative experience was not Christianity but the Mongol yoke, “Mongolia was the source of Russian character and its shelter from Western decadence.”⁴⁵ Not Kiev, the cradle of Russian Christianity, but Moscow the chief agent of the Golden Horde was the force that shaped the Russian empire. As the old adage runs, scratch a Russian and you will find a Tartar. Being Eurasians, the Russians had no need for anything that came from Europe. He also agitated against the Jews who were a “chimerical” or false nation that “drew life not from cosmic rays but from other groups.”⁴⁶ The Russians and other true nations drew their “passionarity”, Gumilev’s key term, directly from cosmic rays. At this point, Gumilev abandons any further recourse to rational thinking and departs on an astral course of his own, much like Himmler and other Nazi cranks. Nevertheless, Putin followed him some of the way and used this term “passionarity” in a key speech of 2012.

Putin had good reasons for following Gumilev in that he, too, became an advocate of Eurasianism and based a large part of his foreign policy on this idea. In practice what this means is that Russian influence is once more to become preeminent among the now independent nations that once constituted the Soviet Empire, especially Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan. The breakaway of the Ukraine from this alignment was seen by Putin and his men

43 Ibid, 81.

44 Ibid, 30.

45 Ibid, 85.

46 Ibid, 87.

as akin to betrayal, an attack on Russia herself, requiring a counter-attack against the Western perpetrators of this geopolitical crime. Hence, his active interference in elections in Europe, Britain and America.

The prime exponents of these ideas are the members of the Izborsk Club inaugurated in 2012, among whom are Putin's close advisors and propagandists, such as Prokhanov, Glazyev and Dugin. Dugin is the most intellectual and possibly the most dangerous of these. He is a straight out "Eurasian" neo-Nazi deeply versed in all the sources of Nazism in German culture. He has studied Fichte, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Schmitt and transferred their ideas from the German to the Russian context. He has made contact with European neo-Nazis, such as the French conspiracy theorist Jean Parvulesco and the philosopher Alain de Benoist of the Nouvelle Droite movement. According to Snyder, "an early influence was Miguel Serrano, author of *Hitler's Last Avatar*, who claimed that the Aryan race owed its superiority to its extra-terrestrial origins."⁴⁷ This is accompanied by ideas derived from Schmitt concerning the Eurasian landmass as the "great space" where the destiny of the world is played out, and the coming battle enacted against the Atlanticist sea-powers of America and Europe; he is particularly averse to the European Union. The Jews come in for the usual anti-Semitic rants.

It is apparent from all these thinkers that fraternité in the context of Russian nationalism is as much of a danger to the world as was German Nazism, seeing that Russia is a military power with as many nuclear weapons as America. At present Putin is cautious and does not venture far from Russia's borders. But his precipitate grab of Crimea and a small part of eastern Ukraine shows what he is capable of, and in some future venture he could overreach himself and provoke global catastrophe. This possibility will persist as long as he is in power, which at present seems to be for a very long time. So, we must always bear in mind Kaplan's words: "These highly-centralized, Politburo-style regimes inside their own countries make them increasingly aggressive beyond their borders, since nationalism can serve as a unifying element in times of social stress."⁴⁸

China is another such Politburo-style regime, also with a supreme leader, Xi Jinping, who is bound to be ruler for life and explicitly pursues the China Dream of national self-assertion. Nationalism in its Chinese version is now a very active ideological force in the shaping of China's foreign policy, having displaced Communism of the Maoist variety. But this new Chinese nationalism is still in a formative phase, it is an ideology in the making. Many Chinese

47 Ibid, 88.

48 Robert Kaplan, *The Return of Marco Polo's World*, op. cit, 32.

intellectuals are now vying for the role of authors of its content, and thereby gaining influence over the doctrine of the ruling Chinese Communist Party, which, as everyone in China knows, is now Communist in name only. It calls its approach “socialism with Chinese characteristics” but this is a euphemism for what we have called despotic capitalism. Nevertheless, rhetorical features of Maoism still remain in the Party’s self-conception and its view of its historic past. These are now conjoined together with traditional Confucianism in a weird collocation that only makes sense to Chinese intellectuals in a way only they are capable of articulating. In what follows we shall explore the ideas of some of these new Chinese thinkers.

One of the most authoritative and original of the new Chinese ideologues is Jiang Shigong. His position is an eclectic combination of ideas drawn from Confucius, Mao and Schmitt. The influence of the last of these gives his work a neo-Nazi flavour that need not be taken too seriously. Nevertheless, just as Dugin has appropriated Schmitt in a neo-Nazism to fit the context of Russia under Putin, so Jiang is doing much the same for Schmitt in regard to China under Xi – thankfully without the accompanying anti-Semitism. Jiang is a leading exponent and translator of Schmitt in China, the man who first brought Schmitt to China. But there is some indication from the way he adapts Schmitt to China that he is aware of the complementary work of Dugin on Schmitt. There is no doubt that Dugin’s work is well known in China. For example, Cui Zhiguan writes a piece in praise of Steve Bannon and Dugin, in which he refers to “the legendary Putin advisor Alexander Dugin.”⁴⁹ The “legendary Dugin” is praised for advocating that Russia must “establish a unique Russian model”, and so must China.⁵⁰

Schmitt’s Nazi ideas are prominent in Jiang and constitute a wholesale rejection of Western notions of the nation-state, of constitutionalism, of the rule of law, and of democracy. These are all described as notions peculiar to Atlanticist sea-faring nations and that have no relevance to China which is a continental power. Somewhat naively he invokes eighteenth century ideas of the climatic and geophysical influences on the constitution and character of nations which are still present in Hegel, whom he quotes.⁵¹ All this in turn is

49 Cui Zhiguan, “Comparing the ideas of Trump’s former advisor Steve Bannon and the legendary Putin advisor Alexander Dugin”, trans. David Ownby. See *Reading and Writing the China Dream*: www.readingthechinadream.com/cui-zhiguan-comparing-bannon-and-dugin.html.

50 Ibid.

51 Jiang Shigong, *China’s Hong Kong*, chap. 5 “Oceanic Thinking from a Continental Base” (Singapore: Springer/China Academic Library, 2017), 59.

linked somewhat incongruously with traditional Confucian imagery of mountains and seas or earth and water. He makes a point of insisting on “the internal consistency of CPC [Chinese Communist Party] theory and that of traditional Confucianism ...”⁵² This represents a wisdom that is beyond the grasp of the West, as he puts it:

Nevertheless, the point that modern western political theory cannot explain is of key importance, because it discloses the fact that in-depth thought of the CPC actually perpetuated the traditional Confucian concept of the All under Heaven. The concept transcends class and ethnicity, transcends the concept of the sovereign state, and combines the differential mode of association of political order with the location thinking of the relationship of the centre and periphery.⁵³

This may sound quaint, but it is far from harmless.

It reveals its true purpose when the Schmittian aspects of attacking the West and all it stands for, and aspiring to world empire for a future reinvigorated Chinese civilization, are fully spelled out in an essay devoted to this subject. According to Jiang, politics has always been about empires, nation-states are only a temporary and mistaken detour, as he asserts:

Only by beginning from the perspective of empire, and understanding the different forms empires assume as they evolve through history can we transcend the ideology of the sovereign, nation-state and understand the role that today's China is playing in the historical evolution of the world empire, and thus chart the course for China's future.⁵⁴

He goes on to add that “since the twentieth century, the inevitable fate of humanity has been to enter into the world empire ...”⁵⁵ Thus far this world empire has been shaped by Western Christian civilization, but its future is inevitably fated to be based on Chinese civilization.

⁵² Ibid, 68.

⁵³ Ibid, 68.

⁵⁴ Jiang Shigong, “The Internal Logic of Super-Sized Political Entities: Empire and World Order”, trans. David Ownby, Blog: *Reading and Writing the China Dream*, www.readingthechinadream.com.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Western Christian civilization has irremediably failed, as its present chaotic state reveals, according to Jiang. It is facing fundamental problems that it has itself brought about and is, therefore, unable to remedy:

This model faces three great unsolved problems: the ever-increasing inequality created by the liberal economy; state failure, political decline, and ineffective government caused by political liberalism; and decadence and nihilism created by cultural liberalism.⁵⁶

These kinds of charges against the West are all too reminiscent of the kinds of propaganda attacks against the Weimar Republic and the democratic liberalism it stood for that Hitler and the Nazis launched a century ago. Apparently, China faces no such problems or any of a similar nature and is the only nation capable of “providing genuine solutions to the three great problems facing world empire 1.0 [and] will provide the blueprint for world empire 2.0”⁵⁷ According to Jiang, the future belongs to China, and in a concluding peroration he spells out very clearly the goal of Chinese imperialism:

As a great world power that must look beyond its borders, China must also reflect on her own future, for her important mission is not only to revive her traditional culture. China must also patiently absorb the skills and achievements of humanity as a whole, and especially those employed by Western civilization, to construct a world empire. On this basis we can see the reconstruction of Chinese civilization and the reconstruction of world order as a mutually reinforcing whole.⁵⁸

Jiang is by no means alone in dreaming such China Dreams; there are many other ideologues whispering such blandishments in Xi Jinping’s ear, just as in Germany there were numerous philosophers vying for Hitler’s attention. Jiang seems to have had some success for his book on Hong Kong must have contributed something to Xi’s toughening stance and the restrictions he has placed on the freedom of speech and assembly in this city-state dependency of China. Thankfully, neither in Hong Kong nor in China itself has this censorship reached the levels of Nazi repression. Intellectual debate is at present still possible in China, but it is rapidly being stifled. Thus, critics have arisen to counter the nationalistic rhetoric and fervour emanating from the neo-Maoists and the

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

neo-Confucians. One such is Rong Jian, who is a private scholar with no official position, so, perhaps, is freer to speak his mind than most others. Nevertheless, even he guards his tongue from uttering the blunt truth and resorts to insinuation and indirection to say what he means. He exposes the new cohort of nationalistic ideologues by comparing them to their Nazi precursors. Thus, he attacks one of them, Wang Hui, the author of a triumphalist “philosophy of victory”, by likening his relation to Xi to that of Heidegger to Hitler.⁵⁹ He points out that “Nazi philosophy is chock-full of this kind of philosophy of victory. Triumph of the Will, the propaganda that Goebbels commissioned, is the classic example.”⁶⁰ There are many other such Chinese critics whom David Ownby has classified as liberals in contrast to those who are Confucians or New Left or, as in Jiang’s case, a combination of both.

However, the final outcome of this debate in China is far from encouraging. The final word on the subject is Rong Jian’s sadly premonitory remark:

I am writing this essay to remind everyone that the “Heidegger moment” is far from over. After philosophy, beliefs, and morals have lost their ultimate hold on intellectuals, we will continue to witness how the decline of intellectuals has helped politics to re-enter a long dark moment.⁶¹

Rong’s words apply as much to Western as to Chinese intellectuals for whom “philosophy, beliefs and morals have lost their ultimate hold” as well, though perhaps in a somewhat different way to their Chinese counterparts. But there, too, “the decline of intellectuals has helped politics to re-enter a long, dark moment.”⁶² This dark moment is what we are calling the twilight of a cultural dark age.

In Part 3 we shall go on to consider how this loss of “philosophy, beliefs and morals” manifests itself not only among intellectuals but also among ordinary people throughout the societies of the West.

59 Rong Jian, “Wang Hui’s ‘Heidegger Moment’”, trans. David Ownby, Blog: *Reading and Writing the China Dream*, op. cit.

60 Ibid.

61 Rong Jian, “Wang Hui’s ‘Heidegger Moment’”, trans. David Ownby, Blog: *Reading the China Dream*.

62 See Harry Redner, *The Triumph and Tragedy of the Intellectuals: Evil, Enlightenment and Death* (New Brunswick/New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2016).

PART 3

Ethics and Ethos



Introduction to Part 3

In the previous section, Part 2, we attempted to provide an outline of Western politics and some key issues of our time. In this Part 3 we shall seek to do something similar for ethics. From politics to ethics is a long jump. What makes it possible is that both are grounded in culture in general or what we might call the ethos. The ethos is the whole culturally bound way of life of a given society. The ethics is that part of it where the most fundamental values and norms of behaviour are lodged. Besides the ethics, the ethos also consists of manners and laws. Manners belong to the mores side of the ethics, and laws belong to the politics side. Thus manners, morals and laws are the key constituents of the ethos. How to relate them to each other will be our main concern in this Part 3.

The fact that our modern advanced societies are so reliant on laws to regulate behaviour must give us pause. Manners and morals, namely, inner self-restraints and socially administered norms and ideals now play a much lesser role in comparison to the external imposition of law and order through a state controlled judicial and policing system. It is true that at least in Western democratic societies the laws are generally just and fairly applied. Rank injustices and miscarriages of justice are rare. Yet, as history has taught us, relying on the state and its laws to uphold morality is a very risky business.

Morality or ethics in Western civilization was never just a matter of law. It went much deeper than law and politics into the whole ethos of society, its sense of itself as a distinct entity with its own identity. Hence the close connection between ethics and religion. For as religion was a crucial distinguishing marker for a society, so, too, its ethics was seen as separating it from different kinds of societies, especially those in other civilizations. Hence the fundamental distinctions, those between Greeks and barbarians, between Christians and pagans, Christians and Moslems, and even between Catholics and Protestants, were all ethical differences to a large extent.

The intimate nexus between ethics and religion drew ever tighter after the Axial Age when ethics was seen as the one and only right path or way for life, and when the gods or the supreme God or Heaven were taken as the guardians of morality. This was when the great ethical systems that have been prevalent ever since arose.¹ As far as the West is concerned, the most crucial role was played by Greek philosophy and Judaic prophecy. In the East there were

¹ See Harry Redner, *Ethical Life: The Past and Present of Ethical Cultures* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

analogous developments carried out by Chinese philosophies and Indian ascetic religions, above all Buddhism. The main and most fundamental ethical differences pivot on this East-West axis. There were, of course, intermediate forms that combine aspects of both, such as Manicheanism, which played at various times a brief but crucial role in the West. Both the Eastern and Western ethical systems went their own separate ways, and both evolved in quite different ways. In the East at a later date Buddhism in China combined with Confucianism and Taoism, and likewise in the West Judaism combined with Greek philosophy to constitute Christianity. We shall briefly outline how this Christian morality developed into Western ethics over the course of history.

Western ethics was from the start a combination of opposites. It began as a syncretist amalgam of the two contradictory moral traditions within the late Roman Empire, which can be encapsulated in the changing meanings of the Latin word *virtus*. To begin with *virtus*, which derives from *vir*, man, carried connotations of manliness and bravery; it was initially applied to military men and referred to the martial qualities of character essential for battle. Later it was de-militarized, so to speak, and generally extended to all citizens. But within a Christian context of the late Roman Empire *virtus* came to be applied to all who were duty bound to serve in a vocation, priests and pious people whether religious or lay, and it meant ascetic discipline, learning and the other qualities of character associated with religious life. This contradiction was inherent throughout the history of Western morality. The Christian virtues of piety and meekness were continually being crossed and undercut by classical, pagan survivals or revivals of the original military meaning of manliness and courage, as, for example, during the Renaissance when Machiavelli coined the term *virtu*, which became the basis of the new politics in *The Prince*. This remained an inherent tension or dialectic throughout the whole course of Western ethics.

An analogous opposition, which overlay the prior more basic one, arose during the Middle Ages when the asceticism of monastic self-denial was confronted with the knightly code of chivalry. The former preached the love of God and withdrawal from the world; the latter gloried in the worldly life of the court, courtliness and courtship or the love of women, most frequently in its adulterous form. Once again, these contradictions were inherent in the conflicting meanings of the word honour, contrasting the honour of the knight with the honour of the monk, the pride of the former set against the humility of the latter.

The ethics of the West is riddled with such dialectical oppositions, which made for its inherent complexity, richness and vitality. Thus, for example, the Reformation and counter-Reformation gave rise to the contrast between the Protestant ethic and Catholic morality, this difference being inherent in

the changing meanings of the word 'calling' or vocation. Catholics continued to regard a calling as enjoining an other-worldly religious vocation, whereas the Protestants, especially the Calvinists, took a calling to mean an inner-worldly ascetic vocation. This difference is the basis of Weber's famous account of the rise of modern capitalism. However much this does to explain capitalism, which even Weber later admitted it does so only partially, it does explain the different ethical orientations of Protestant and Catholic societies, which had a profound impact on how they reacted in respect of modern developments not only in economics, but also politics, science and technology.

With the onset of the Enlightenment the dialectical conflict took a still higher turn when the *philosophes* and their later successors, the intellectuals, attempted to secularize and rationalize the whole of the Western ethical tradition, and free it from its moorings in religion and theology, where it had previously developed. This set off a whole round of conflicts between traditionalists, who persisted in maintaining a close connection between ethics and religion in some way or other, and progressivists who wished to break this nexus once and for all. Philosophically considered, the process began in the seventeenth century with Spinoza's ethics which gave rise to what Jonathan Israel calls the Radical Enlightenment.² It continued in the eighteenth century with the anti-clerical polemics of Diderot and many of the other materialistically inclined *philosophes*. Attempts at a kind of reconciliation between a secularized ethics and religion were made in different ways by Rousseau and Kant.

During the course of the French Revolution the battle between secularist and religious ethics took a violent form and became ideologically imbued. The proclamation of the revolutionary credo of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité* and the proclamation of the Rights of Man on a purely secular, rational basis was an attempt to break with religion and tradition and instead to align ethics with the new revolutionary politics. This provided a dangerous precedent for it made ethics coextensive with law and thereby placed it in the hands of the state.

The consequences of that move would work themselves out over the next two centuries. As the state became more powerful and all-embracing during the course of the nineteenth century, more and more of the scope of ethics was taken over by government agencies. More and more laws were passed governing every contingency in which ethical issues might arise. Thus, for example, what had previously been the provision of succour for people in need through

2 Jonathan Israel, *The Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

personal discretion, following the long-established injunctions of Christian charity, became a state-instituted and financed unemployment benefit, widow's pension, child endowment and so on for all other eleemosynary matters. From the point of view of the recipients, this had obvious benefits for they no longer had to rely on the vagaries of charity with its demeaning connotations. However, placing them in dependence on the State had dangerous consequences for what the State gives, it can also take away. If everyone were to become dependent on the State then the whole role of ethics would be compromised.

This is precisely what happened under the totalitarian rule of Bolshevik Socialism and Fascist National Socialism. Socialism began in the nineteenth century as a number of allied political movements to bring about social justice by means of revolution or radical reform. Its basic impetus and orientation were ethical but the means it proposed to achieve its ends was political. This inevitably meant that ethics was subordinated to politics. And once political power was achieved, as in the twentieth-century totalitarian regimes, this in turn meant that ethics was identified with the State. Thus, state power and its ruling ideology came to determine what was right and wrong. Europe and the world in general have learned to their cost what this led to and what moral horrors were perpetrated in the name of ethical ideals.

Fortunately, those times are now over, and such dangers are now past. But in the meantime, other dangers that are no longer political and ideological but more broadly cultural, have arisen to erode the ethical substance of peoples' lives. It is not that people behave badly or do each other harm or that they can be considered in any sense evil or wicked. Rather to the contrary, people are extremely well behaved, nothing very outrageous happens in our advanced societies; and when it does so rarely, it is usually a matter for the police and law courts. However, the reason why people are so well behaved no longer has much to do with ethics in any fundamental sense.

People on the whole are well behaved because they are well adjusted to social expectations, they are obedient to the laws and rarely think of flouting them. The few who do, generally embark on risky criminal careers. For most others it is conformity rather than conscience that keeps them on the right side of the law. This means that ethics as opposed to legality no longer plays much of a role in determining behaviour. It is fortunate that our laws are in conformity with the fundamental ethical precepts of Western civilization. But we would soon see what people are capable of if this were not the case, as the lessons to be drawn from Nazi Germany and Bolshevik Russia have so graphically demonstrated. Any naïve view one might have had in previous centuries of peoples' innate goodness or humanity must now be abandoned as

humanitarian illusions. *Homo homini lupus* is perhaps closer to the harsher truth of human existence, especially in trying circumstances, always setting aside the few virtuous individuals to be found in every society.

The present erosion of ethical life is something else again, it has nothing to do with idealistic ideologies. It is more the consequence of regimented conformity that the rule of law has imposed on bureaucratized and over-regulated societies. Law and order are now the by-words and ethics is no longer needed for social peace or for the provision of succour for the needy. The State has taken over much of the role of provider as well as keeper of the peace. Thus, politics and law have gradually been displacing ethics. We shall see how this works itself out in society and what consequences it has for the moral character of individuals.

The tendency for cultural displacement or substitution is one that pervades the whole ethos. It transforms our whole way of life from one originally based on traditional moral practices to one increasingly permeated by techniques that are frequently made possible by new technologies. Hence as technology progresses so the whole tenor of life alters. The rapidity with which these changes take place is astonishing when compared to the slow pace of changing habits, customs and mores of the past. The latest instance of this is the invasion of our private lives by social media made possible by the internet and the erosion of the ethic of privacy and discretion. The very sense of shame is being rendered redundant when exposing oneself in every conceivable way, laying bare both body and soul on social media, has become acceptable under the cover of anonymity. But this is only the latest development in a process that has been going on for some considerable time, at least since the start of the twentieth century.

In the next chapter we shall be mainly concerned with this issue. But in the one after that, Chapter 6, we shall consider the ethos more broadly in its general cultural orientations, focussing largely on current developments that have made the ethos of contemporary societies so very different to the ones of the past in our Western civilization or that of any other civilization. The differences are, indeed, so large that it has become questionable whether we can even speak of culture any more in the old sense. And, of course, something similar also holds for ethics as well. Are we moral beings in the way our ancestors were in the olden days? These are some of the crucial considerations we will raise in the subsequent chapters.

Manners, Morals and Laws

1 Success and Succession

The behaviour of people in a society, the social ethos in a broad sense, tends to be governed in three ways, through manners, morals and laws. Historically and sociologically speaking, not all societies distinguish between these in the same sense or even distinguish between them at all. In a general way, the more sophisticated and civilized a society becomes, the more some such distinctions tend to be drawn; and the less advanced a society is in this respect, the less it is prone to separating forms of behaviour in such terms. In primitive societies such concepts distinguishing between ways of judging behaviour do not occur at all; all forms of behaviour are treated indifferently in a traditional way. Hence, it is a mark of civilization to make such distinctions. These are, of course, very pronounced and nuanced in Western societies. We shall be mainly referring to such societies at different periods of time.

Manners, morals and laws are governed by different types of norms. Those of manners prescribe what it is proper to do, those of morals determine what it is meritorious or virtuous to do, and those of law enjoin what is obligatory to be done on pain of punishment. In any given society, these three types of norms can be in close accord with each other or they can to some degree stand in opposition and contradict each other. Which of these norms dominates in a society in general, or in the different social classes of the one society, can also vary enormously. In Western societies the aristocracy tends to subscribe to good manners to an inordinate extent, in extreme cases being indifferent to morals and to law. To commit an impropriety or something shameful might be considered worse than a crime. By contrast, the bourgeoisie, especially among the religious and the pious, were much more apt to be morally virtuous, even to the point of prudery in sexual matters. The poorest classes had their own traditional moral codes, which they maintained rigorously, but they could be indifferent to law, which they often flouted. There is honour among thieves; and to get by poor people had often to resort to one kind of theft or another. Such differences still obtain in a vestigial way in contemporary societies in so far as traditional class differences have persisted.

In contemporary society manners play a much lesser role than before, when people were to the manner born. At present, it is the survivors of the old upper classes who still strive to maintain the vestiges of former good manners. In

Britain, the top elite schools, the so-called “public” schools, still try to live up to the medieval Wyckhamite adage “manners maketh the man”. Most other schools have long given up any attempt to inculcate manners in their charges. In the media and among the lower classes there is a deliberate flouting of manners, and flaunting of vulgarity is practiced as a sign of genuineness or of authenticity. Swearing and bad language in general is cultivated by politicians and top officials and bosses amongst themselves to indicate manly toughness. In the cinema, of course, everything can be said and everything shown. There are no restraints of embarrassment or shame, which traditionally were effective in inhibiting the worst forms of behaviour and exhibitionism.

Manners are a matter of tact; morals are a matter of conscience; there is no necessary relation between them. Nevertheless, in the upbringing of children, the teaching of manners is a good preparation for imparting morals. Thus, showing consideration for other people in the ordinary course of interaction is at least a start to treating them with due care and respect in more serious contexts. This is not to say that people with good manners cannot be evil, for experience teaches that this can all too commonly be the case. Yet the imparting of politeness, discretion and a sense of shame can contribute much to the moral education and tone of a whole class or even society. The Victorians might have been moral hypocrites, but they did recognize the value of what they called good upbringing in setting moral standards. For as Rochefoucauld said hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue, which indicates at least that virtue is recognized.

In contemporary societies there is far less hypocrisy, and part of the reason for this is that moral standards are now much laxer or have been abandoned altogether. Certainly, standards in sexual morality are almost non-existent above the age of consent. The old adage “all is fair in love and war” has now been generalized to other spheres apart from love or war. In business affairs, which once were governed by the precept “my word is my bond”, now an unwritten contract is not worth the paper it isn’t written on, as the Hollywood mogul Samuel Goldwyn so cynically put it. The reason that it is only the written contract that counts is because it can be enforced by law. Hence people tend to rely more and more on contracts and other legal documents to protect themselves against bad faith. And this in itself is an indication of a lack of trust even in the most intimate of personal relations. Prenuptial agreements are a sign that married couples do not trust each other from the very start to act decently where property is involved.

Law is what most people now rely on in managing their affairs and their relations with each other. As we shall see, there are innumerable ways in which morality has been usurped by legality. And as a result of that, the laws have

proliferated. Every sphere of human activity is now regulated by so many laws that only legal text-books can list and specify them all. And only specialized lawyers know what is in such tomes, and what these laws prohibit or allow. Ordinary people can no longer manage their lives themselves or enter into any binding relationship without the help and advice of legal professionals. Life has become a complex business, and in many ways, it now has to be conducted like a business. It used to be the case that people did nothing of which their priests or pastors would disapprove; now they do nothing of which their lawyers would disapprove.

Law has now gained ascendancy not only over morals, but over manners as well. Judgements of what constitute proper and improper behaviour, which were formerly subject to the norms of discretion or politeness, are now subject to legal rulings. Whereas previously it was considered vulgar and rude to touch women inappropriately, now it is treated as sexual harassment and subject to criminal charges. It is most likely true that the law offers much more certain and secure protection to women than relying on gentlemanly conduct by men. But it makes for an utterly different way of conducting relations between the sexes, where the threat of possible criminal proceedings always hovers in the background. It is somewhat similar in so many other respects where reliance on good manners has been abandoned in favour of legislation and court proceedings.

Fortunately, it is still the case that in Western liberal democratic societies the laws are prevalently in accord with the norms of morality and generally in keeping with the proprieties that are widely acknowledged in such societies. Where the laws are lacking in some respects they can be reformed accordingly, and there are usually interest groups and associations pressing for such changes. This is how in such countries a decent and tolerant society has been achieved. Most of the injustices and even crimes previously practised or condoned in traditional society have been abolished. This is how slavery, gross exploitation, persecution of sexual deviants or free thinkers and many other iniquities have been abrogated. There is no doubt that we are living in a society that is much fairer and more just than ever before.

But it is a society of justice based on law, admittedly thus far on good laws. And the law is in turn based on the State, therefore dependent on legislators, judges and ultimately on policemen. Hence, when the State changes and there is regime change, so, too, do the politicians, officials and functionaries, and eventually so does the law as well. We saw this happening in drastic ways throughout the twentieth century, and to a lesser extent it is going on at present in many countries, even within Europe itself. We now know that by perfectly legal means the State can enact laws that transgress the basic principles

of Western morality. And where the people have become demoralized due to some catastrophic social upheaval that leads to a breakdown in social relations – as can happen after revolutions and other such social disasters – they can become bereft of moral conscience and all too ready to follow the dictates of political demagogues and dictators. This is how the most heinous crimes of the twentieth century were committed by people who could claim to be acting sincerely in what seemed to them to be good causes, and that many of them could actually believe that what they were doing was conducive to the good of humanity.

What makes it possible for ethics to be discounted or for it to play a recessive role is that the whole ethos in advanced contemporary societies is now very different from what it was in traditional societies of the past. And as the whole social ethos has changed, so has the moral character of people. What such momentous transformations were due to, we have already examined in the previous chapters. Above all, our societies and consequently our social lives are subject to what we have called the Forces of Modernity, namely capitalism, the State, science and technology in their most advanced forms. These have completely altered the way we live and relate to each other in every respect. And these changes are continuing and even accelerating so that it can no longer be assumed at the beginning of a life time that what matters will still be more or less the same at the end of it. There is even less continuity between one generation and another for the conditions of living from the one to the other are bound to be utterly different.

Compared to our contemporary societies, undergoing continuous rapid and radical change, those of the past were stable and constant even if they were not static. This made for an ethos governed by long established cultural traditions. The ethics of the fathers were bound to be maintained by the sons, and by the sons' sons in turn for all time, as it was commonly believed. People rooted in an established past could look forward to an assured future. Hence, their present was for them the connecting bridge between the past and the future. It was not the "be-all and the end-all – here, but here – upon this bank and shoal of time", as it was for Macbeth at the moment of extreme action and as it has become for us at present. At that moment Macbeth was intent only on success, he was oblivious to succession, and so are most of us now. Success now is our be-all and end-all. And as Macbeth found out, this makes a mockery of ethics.

It is now commonly said that the past is a different country, but actually it is the present that is the strange country. We now live in a different time, that is, in a different kind of time, for our relation to the past and the future is not what it used to be when continuities held and traditions were in force. The past is rapidly disappearing, effaced by constant change, by the creative-destruction

of renewal and renovation, if not by outright devastation. The future is a blank, for due to incessant change it is completely unforeseeable and unimaginable, it could be anything or it could be nothing. We are stuck in an ever-expanding present with no future to look forward to or past to look back on, without prospect or retrospect. Our time is that of the be-all and end-all of the here and now. We might call this a time of presentism, as Christopher Lasch defines it:

To live for the moment is the prevailing passion – to live for yourself, not for your predecessors or posterity. We are fast losing the sense of historical continuity, the sense of belonging to a succession of generations originating in the past and stretching into the future.¹

At a time of presentism all that matters is the having and the getting now. Hence *carpe diem* becomes the order of the day. Grab what you can now, and do so quickly, do not delay or wait for better prospects in the future. This is the prescription for a success-oriented mode of behaviour. Succession no longer matters, for there is nobody to inherit and there is no inheritance. We have all become disinherited, since heritage no longer counts as nothing lasts; what seems most secure today and most valuable will be worthless and gone tomorrow. Tomorrow itself might never come, for the very continuity of the world is no longer assured, since that, too, could come to an end, or change so drastically as not to be recognizable any more.

It is these conditions of our time that make ethical life very difficult and, in some ways, next to impossible. Ethics developed within a much more stable world, when there was an order of generations and when traditions held. A good name and reputation meant something, for people cared for the after-life both here on earth as well as in heaven. Fame was a noble goal to which only a few aspired, whether in active or contemplative life. Nobody confused it with notoriety; the famous and the infamous were not classed together as celebrities on the media. In short, for ethics to have any meaning it must matter what kind of a life someone leads. Thus, for instance, it was not just a question of becoming wealthy, but even more so of how that wealth is acquired.

Success matters, of course, in all societies and to all people, but today it is all that matters, for few questions are now asked about how it is achieved. And this is the ethical nub of the matter. What a person is prepared to do or will not do to be successful in any kind of undertaking determines whether that

1 Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 1979), Chapter 1.

person has an ethical character. In a society where being successful increasingly depends on being prepared to do what one's rivals are not willing to do, there is every incentive not to persevere with moral scruples of conscience. To do so is most likely to turn one into a loser when becoming a winner is all that counts. Being a loser or a failure has become synonymous with being worthless.

However, a condition of success is keeping on the right side of the law, for no ambitious person wishes to be entangled in legal disputes or, worse still, to be judged guilty of any crime or impropriety. Hence, all such people take great care that they act within the law or the rules in general no matter how their actions might otherwise be lacking in ethical propriety. But skating on thin ice at the very edge of the law is a calculated risk and is frequently considered worth taking, for it gains one an edge on those rivals not prepared to go so far and run the risks involved. These can be considerably lessened if one can afford clever lawyers to argue the case on one's behalf and get the sentence mitigated if convicted, or perhaps allow one to escape with a plea bargain. Thus, life for such successful people can become a matter of calculated risks where ethical issues no longer play any part.

To gauge the extent to which this kind of attitude to life has become the new normal, as it is now put, we might compare the place of ethics now with that prevailing a few centuries ago. This calls for a comparative study of the ethos as a whole, of manners, morals and law. To make the contrast as sharp and clear as possible we shall rely on two novelists, Jane Austen's depiction of the ethos of British society two centuries ago and Saul Bellow's analogous portrayal of American society in the contemporary period.

2 The Austen Paradox

At present, Jane Austen is surely the most popular and widely read author in the English language and probably in any language whatever. She commands a huge mass public, judging by the number of copies of her works that are sold, both in the original English and in translation into most other languages; and the audience that comes into contact with her works is multiplied many times if the viewers of films, TV series and other media versions are taken into account. Besides that, there are also numerous adaptations and rewritings of her main themes and characters modernized and brought up to date in versions that range from pastiche to parody and plagiarism, as might be expected in any age of post-Modernist art. In short, there is now a large Austen literary industry supplying reading material for mostly female consumers, with young

women particularly well represented, more or less as in Austen's own day, except multiplied a hundred-fold or more. This is not to say that men are not also drawn to Austen, though now in far lesser proportions, for men are far less inclined to read novels these days.

However, the world in which her works now appear has little in common with the world of her own time, her readers now lead lives that are totally unlike those of her heroines and heroes, or most other characters in her novels. Both the ethos as a whole and the ethic have totally changed. In this chapter we shall focus on manners, morals and laws, on the conventional, ethical and legal changes that have taken place over the last two centuries in British and most other Western societies, particularly in America. As we shall see, there is a highly paradoxical discordance between the manners, morality and laws of Austen's Britain and those which prevail at present, they are almost the opposites of each other. We shall call this the Austen paradox.

We can arrive at a preliminary sense of what these changes have amounted to when we compare the standards of ethics and etiquette that governed behaviour in Jane Austen's time, especially for upper-class women, with the standards current among her readers, mainly young women, at present. Notions of shame and prudery have been drastically transformed, as have many other of the so-called moral emotions. Given the irrelevancy of the feelings, attitudes and standards affirmed in her works to the present time, it is something of a puzzle that her works are so widely read. Perhaps it is nothing but a game of make-believe, a sentimental indulgence in finer feelings which are now but a dim historical memory. Or is there more to it than that?

In Austen's novels the heroines and heroes, who are invariably ladies and gentlemen in the full and proper sense of these terms, behave with what is to us extraordinary moral propriety and decorum. They evince scruples of conscience and principles of honour that are to us astonishing. There were two strands of morality: a basic Christian moral code moulded in the spirit of the Protestant ethic – Austen was after all the daughter of an Anglican clergyman – was fused with the honour code of the aristocracy, which the gentry and the upper bourgeoisie had also imbibed. Her heroines undertake charitable activities towards those less fortunate than themselves, and her heroes often perform good deeds in strict anonymity. As all her plots concern courtship practices, she is particularly attentive to how a lady and gentleman should treat each other in matters of love – sex, of course, is unmentionable and never enters into consideration.

Her novels were intended as moral guides for young ladies, so it is most unlikely that they reflect the actual behaviour of people in her period. At the time, nobody begrudged the Duke of Wellington his whores, except his poor

put-upon wife, of course, or Nelson his mistress, except that Lady Hamilton was not acceptable once he was dead. But the fact that powerful people flouted the commonly accepted norms and ideals does not mean that they were not valid or were not believed in. There was a double standard for men and for women and besides much hypocrisy; however, vice and virtue were clearly distinguished.

Today for the young readers of Austen's novels there is no longer any such clear distinction. There are no courtship rituals and no standards by which the sexes conduct their affairs. And sexual relations are now all too often mere affairs, carried on in more like the business rather than romantic sense of this term. After the sexual revolution, after one-night stands, after dating apps and hook-up encounters between perfect strangers – there is rarely any talk of love or any scruple about how sexual transactions between so-called consenting adults unfold. It is a give and take exchange of mutual benefits, generally, but not always, without abuse. All this is well known to the young and not so young people who read Austen, whose ambience now seems to them more like a fairy-tale world than any reality with which they can identify. Perhaps that is why they take to her work; it helps them escape from the grim and grimy experiences of their own lives into the imaginary reality of a much better past society where people were different and much more considerate toward each other.

Unfortunately, this is mere make-believe and wishful thinking, for taken over all, Austen's Britain was a most unjust society compared to our own. Any Australian whose ancestors were convicts transported during Austen's time to the other side of the world – presumably never to return – knows this sad and pitiful fact all too well. For this was the nature of British draconian law and its hanging judges at that time. People were convicted for what are to us trivial offences and condemned to death or to exile for life and indentured labour for many years. Hence the common saying among those driven to crime by sheer necessity, "might as well hang for a sheep as a lamb." Austen's characters never have to face such necessities. They do not go in fear of press-gangs which kidnapped young men for service in the navy, where life for them was governed by the lash, rum and buggery, as Churchill much later sardonically declared. Even though her brothers were high ranking captains in the navy, Austen shows no awareness of this side of life in her novels, though she must have known about it.

None of this is meant or can be taken as criticism of Austen as a writer. As a writer of novels meant for young ladies, she was bound by the conventions of this genre and could not go counter to them, and these dictated a highly circumscribed and limited social reality, a little like that of classical drama or later drawing-room comedy; bad or obscene things that happened were

placed off-stage and could not be shown or brought into the action. Austen accepted these limitations and her sharp wit and satirical intelligence thrived on them. She can no more be criticized for not taking in a wider social scene than Chopin can be faulted for not writing symphonies. Austen, like Chopin, is a miniaturist, but equally a master of her limited scope, for as Goethe declared at the time: "In Beschränkung zeigt sich der Meister".

We have drawn on Austen not to engage in literary criticism but to illustrate what we have called the Austen paradox. This consists in the anomaly that morality and legality can be in contradictory relation to each other. In Austen's time people subscribed to and mostly lived up to strict and ideal moral demands on their personal lives, especially if they were ladies and gentlemen. But at the same time, they constituted the ruling class of a society whose laws were very unjust and unjustly applied to those of the lower classes, especially the indigent and poor. The reason for this is that British law was primarily designed to protect property and the prerogatives of the owners of property, the aristocracy, gentry and bourgeoisie. On the whole, these were morally good people who lived in a morally bad society.

At present we are in the converse situation, we are mostly amoral people living in a morally good society. We have very good laws which guarantee us all kinds of protections and rights; but morally considered we may be much worse as people, or at least people to whom morality matters much less. In fact, moral considerations do not play an important role in how we conduct our lives. In most important matters we have much more regard to and a much greater reliance on the law. The law now protects us in every respect, so that we do not need to trust or depend on other peoples' scruples of conscience, or sense of honour, or even good will. In relations between people trust is at a minimum and contractual legality at a maximum.

The Austen paradox depicts our present predicament in ethics and ethos as compared to that of our ancestors in the past, but it does not explain how and why such an inversion should have occurred. What happened historically in Western societies over the course of the last two centuries to bring it about? Why is it that the law has improved so much in that time? Conversely, why has the peoples' own internal moral compass pointing them in the right direction been abandoned as a guide to action? Are these two developments related to each other? We shall return to this question later in our account.

The huge and unparalleled improvements in law can in large part be explained by the extensive reform movement current since the age of Enlightenment. Indeed, this was the main purpose of enlightenment, to legislate humanitarian laws and do away with the injustices and barbarities of the previous legal codes. This process began among the so-called enlightened

despots, such as Frederick the Great of Prussia, Leopold II of Austria, and even Catherine II of a still feudal Russia, at least to a limited extent. But it was the French Revolution and the proclamation of the Rights of Man that affirmed politically the basic principles of a new legal code that Napoleon finalized and instituted. This is what the British ruling class, to which Austen's family belonged, at least initially so doggedly and determinedly struggled against, both in word, thought and deed. Edmund Burke wrote against it and the Duke of Wellington fought against it.

But over time the legal reforms in Britain could not be resisted, despite the Duke's firm opposition as Prime Minister to any relaxation. This is where we can draw on the work of a later woman novelist, possibly a greater writer than Austen, George Eliot and her novel *Middlemarch*. This is not so popular these days, but it has much more to teach us about the historical process through which the Great Reform Bill was passed and the age of reform was initiated in Britain. Another great novelist, Charles Dickens was involved in the process as well, for his novels, particularly *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, and *Great Expectations*, graphically revealed the injustices of the old laws and how they were applied, such as interminable litigation, imprisonment for debt, and transportation to Australia for life.

From then on, step by slow and painful step, legislation was enacted which brought an even greater measure of justice to British law. The laws of all other Western countries were headed in the same direction, some getting there earlier and some later. We need not spell out in any detail the legal history of enlightened and advanced societies, which at present includes just about all countries with legal codes. This does not mean, of course, that all actually practice what they preach or keep to their own declared laws; in fact, many do not do so, or do so in biased ways. There is still plenty of scope for reform in all societies.

We know what happened legally over the intervening two centuries to bring about the Austen paradox, for it is all clearly spelled out in the documents and textbooks of legal and political history. But what happened ethically and how the whole moral ethos was transformed cannot be ascertained from official texts and we must once more turn to novelists and literary writers. However, before we do so, we might turn to a living example in the career of President Trump since it is not too difficult to see what has come to pass even without the aid of literature. Trump himself and the whole course of his life is a prominent instance of what it probably takes and what kind of a person one is likely to become if one is intent on reaching his level of success, wealth, eminence and power.

But even more telling than the man himself is the sheer fact that Trump is so admired and acclaimed by so many who model themselves on him and that numerous supporters were willing to condone his activities and vote him into the highest office in the land and continue upholding his claim that he was cheated of re-election in the face of all contrary evidence. This is not meant as a political judgement on his policies, most of which might well have been tactically correct, though only time will tell how successful they will turn out to be in the long run; nor does it call for any moral judgement on the man himself. We may well ask if there has ever been a man less morally fit to hold such an office in America. But there is a more pertinent question: what conclusion must be drawn about what are at present the accepted standards of truth telling and honest business dealings among a major portion of the American people. As Michiko Kakutani puts it in her aptly titled book *The Death of Truth*:

It is not unlikely that a candidate who had already been exposed during the campaign for his history of lying and deceptive business practices would have gained such popular support, were portions of the public not somewhat blasé about truth telling and were there not more systemic problems with how people get their information and how they've come to think in increasingly partisan terms.²

The problem is not Trump, for there have always been and will be cunning and conniving businessmen. It is what his election to the Presidency and continuing support indicates about the American people and their cynicism regarding ethical standards in public life.

There is a prevailing cynicism in American life about politics, business and public affairs generally that is indicative of demoralization in response to dubious practices undertaken in these spheres. Truth has been a main casualty of such debasement because it succumbs to incessantly repeated propaganda and advertising broadcast on behalf of the rich and powerful. As Zeynep Tufekci states: "In the networked public sphere the goal of the powerful often is not to convince people of the truth of a particular narrative or to block a particular piece of narrative from getting out (that is increasingly difficult) but to produce resignation, cynicism, and a sense of disempowerment among the people."³ Deirdre McCloskey points to such a form of demoralization in general in calling it the "Chicago Way," which she claims is prevalent in Illinois and

² Michiko Kakutani, *The Death of Truth* (London: William Collins, 2018), 16.

³ Quoted in *ibid*, 143.

Louisiana, and by now many other states in America. She refers to Italy, where it is equally prevalent for similar reasons:

Sileoni observes that in her native Italy, and in many other countries lacking effective indignation against unethical behaviour, not to mention such sub countries as Illinois and Louisiana with a similar lack, a problem with law cannot usually be solved by adding another law ... Sileoni's point is that the Italians and the Illinoisans have no ethics that effectively condemn absurd results and bad behaviour. They laugh sardonically and shrug their shoulders and say, *Sai com'e*, "You know how it is in our 'Chicago Way,'" instead of expressing indignation in action by throwing the bums out.⁴

Chicago has long been a by-word for Tammany Hall machinations, Mafia activity and political corruption. It is also the hometown of the novelist Saul Bellow and the setting of most of his novels. One of his main themes from the 1960s onwards is the moral corruption and deceit infusing itself into American life in the private as well as the public sphere. In his first major novel in this vein, *Herzog*, according to Ruth Miller, a friend and biographer:

Bellow was thinking as much of the disintegration of society as he was lamenting the loss of marriage. His desire to love and be loved had ended in hatred and betrayal, but there was worse treachery to explain than killer wives and crafty friends. Chicago was a predator and Chicago was the simulacrum of America, and America worked hard at the business of the world.⁵

According to this it seems that the Chicago Way is also the American Way and soon to become the way of the world.

In novel after novel Bellow traces the steep descent of America down the Chicago Way. All his work is set against the actual decay, both physical and moral, of Chicago itself. In a talk delivered in 1980 to a Conference on Creativity, Bellow contrasted the old Chicago of his own youth with the new Chicago of the present day. As Miller records it, Bellow said that "on the benches where once garment workers read their poems in their mother tongue, Yiddish, to one another, and on the corner of Potomac and Rockwell Streets, the city's

4 Deidre McCloskey, *Bourgeois Equality*, op. cit, 137.

5 Ruth Miller, *Saul Bellow: A Biography of the Imagination* (New York; St Martin's Press, 1991), 141.

largest narcotics market thrived. On his old turf, murders were now daily occurrences.”⁶ The rich have isolated and insulated themselves from all this mayhem by both moral indifference and physical barriers. “The new Chicago was an enclave of immunity and privilege, indifferent to the outlying despair, the rapes and killings, and the new politicians were only simulations of integrity, piety, sincerity and dependability.”⁷ Bellow did not live long enough to survive into the era of Trump when the new politicians no longer have to simulate moral virtue; now they can be much more themselves and openly reveal their vices, for their electors no longer care about morality.

Perhaps the very nadir of the Chicago Way is represented by Bellow’s last major work *The Dean’s December*, a kind of tale of two cities. In this sprawling novel – as usual replete with the mundane details of his personal life, his numerous marriages and divorces – he also has a more serious purpose: a comparison between Chicago, depicted as “the contempt center of the United States”, and Bucharest, described as the “inheritor of Ceausescu’s Oriental brutality and Byzantine despotism ... the Europe of wars and revolutions, bombings and camps and terror and the Gulag.”⁸ It is true that Chicago never experienced any of these horrors, so common to many of the capitals of Europe, but did Chicago come to all that much better than Bucharest? “But what, after all, was the difference, now, between the Party in Bucharest, and the machine politicians of Chicago?”⁹ Of course, this is a rhetorical question to which multiple answers can be given, and we certainly cannot liken the former Mayor Daley and his mobsters to Ceausescu and the Securitate. But, on the other hand, the citizens of Bucharest did soon thereafter rise and rid themselves of the Party and its leaders. Are the citizens of Chicago capable of any such clean sweep of their corrupt machine politicians?

It might be objected that Bucharest and Europe in general is one story of moral degeneration and Chicago and America in general quite another story. It is true that they followed different paths and that the Chicago Way should never be compared with the way that led through Auschwitz and the Gulag. But Bellow asks if the conditions in which they both ended up were all that different, if we take Chicago to represent the globalized world dominated by America. We shall return to the Bucharest story presently; for the moment we will still continue with that of Chicago.

6 Ibid, 257.

7 Ibid, 257.

8 Ibid, 269.

9 Ibid, 267.

An ad hominem objection against Bellow is that he has left out of account his own story in Chicago. After all, did he not make his way through the University of Chicago, and was he not selected for the august and exclusive Committee on Social Thought, together with others of great note, and eventually also gain a professorship in the Department of English? Does not this represent another side of Chicago to be set against the slums in near proximity to its university? And is this not true of so many American cities with their great universities surrounded by festering inner city degradation? What then are we to make of Higher Education in America? Is it not a force for truth and goodness and beauty?

Unfortunately, no matter how highly he might have rated some of his own colleagues, among whom were Arendt and Hayek, Bellow thought very poorly of academics and intellectuals in general. In the speech he gave to the Conference on Creativity to which we previously referred he called intellectuals “ruling reptiles.”¹⁰ He had other choice terms for academics which he reiterated in his various addresses and articles. The moral decrepitude of academia became very evident to him following the student riots of the 1960s, as is evident from the Foreword he contributed to the book by his friend, Allen Bloom, where he refers to universities as furthering “the disheartening expansion of trained ignorance and bad thought.”¹¹

Bloom refers to the Sixties as the period when “the professors, the repositories of our best traditions and highest intellectual aspirations were fawning over what was nothing better than a rabble; publicly confessing their guilt and apologizing for not having understood the most important moral issues, the proper response to which they were learning from the mob; expressing their willingness to change the university’s goals and the content of what they taught.”¹² According to Bloom, and Bellow no doubt agreed, this is when the university began its moral collapse, and abdication from its responsibility of inculcating the values of civilization. Bloom goes on to say that “the American university in the sixties was experiencing the same dismantling of the structure of rational inquiry as had the German university in the thirties. No longer believing in their higher vocation, both gave way to a highly ideologized student populace.”¹³ Once again, we are asked to see that the American experience of demoralization is not all that different from the European: “Whether it

10 Ibid, 258.

11 Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, Foreword by Saul Bellow (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 17.

12 Ibid, 313.

13 Ibid, 313.

be Nuremberg or Woodstock, the principle is the same”, namely “handing over the *decision* about values to the folk, the *Zeitgeist*, the relevant.”¹⁴

Bloom examines how the goals of higher education and the content of university subjects had already changed, and these changes are by now, more than thirty years later, much more aggravated. The professional faculties, engineering, medicine and law, have changed least, but new faculties were introduced claiming equal professional status, above all the business studies school with its newly minted MBA. This was the route for students from the elite universities to Wall Street and other money-making venues. Many of their best and brightest followed this path in the age of “greed is good”. In the older faculties there was also upheaval both in what was studied and where this led. There was least change in the natural sciences, though these no longer led to secure, well-paying jobs; many PhDs in physics, for example, had to make do at least for some years as taxi drivers. The most affected were the human sciences, both the social sciences and humanities. There the radical student demands were easiest to satisfy since nobody much cared what was taught or who did the teaching. Arts or social science degrees did not provide any professional qualifications, except in a few departments, such as economics and psychology, and these were more zealously guarded. In all the others, the administrators had no qualms in letting the radicals undertake their long march through the institutions as tenured professors.

3 The Rule of Law

We can now return once more to the Austen paradox which is our main concern. We have so far dealt with its moral side and now we need to place it in relation to its legal side. Legally speaking, at present, things have never looked better. The law now protects everyone in almost every way and in every eventuality. There are laws offering redress against any kind of assault, insult or injustice. There are laws granting everyone all kinds of personal rights, which can be invoked to claim benefits and preferments that usually the State is obliged to supply. All our relations whether to the State or other public institutions or autonomous bodies or privately owned corporations are covered by a dense network of laws that only thick legal tomes can list. For example, the US Federal Government rules were only 2620 pages in 1936, but have over time increased to 28961 pages by 2012, or more than 30 times greater. Only

14 Ibid, 314.

highly specialized expert lawyers have the competence to trawl through such tomes to know what the government requires or allows people to do. Ordinary citizens no longer know their rights and obligations but must consult a specialized lawyer for that purpose. The more the laws proliferate, the more dependent they become on lawyers.

Lawyers have now become an indispensable necessity for conducting one's life, both private and public, since there is some law or other, frequently unknown to the ordinary person, covering every consequential step one takes, especially so in American society. As a result, there are more lawyers per head of population in America than anywhere else in the world. Obviously, they are necessary and are used frequently because they all earn a good living and some become rich. Both corporate bodies, institutions, and other organizations employ the full-time services of lawyers because all transactions are enmeshed in laws. Nobody any longer knows the extent of all the current laws, as it is difficult to decide which are still active and applicable and which are dead and not to be invoked; even the most experienced judges are no longer sure which laws take priority. And new laws are being enacted all the time and published in thick documents that only specialists read. Navigating in this legal maze requires the most astute and usually highest paid legal explorers, as Bellow discovered in his numerous divorce proceedings in the state of Illinois.

But now double divorcing wives and perhaps women in general prefer to rely on the letter of the law, rather than the decency and gentlemanly virtues of their ex-husbands. They demand rights in all kinds of respects to be established through legislation and engraved in law. They no longer trust male generosity or forbearance. And the same goes for men in their dealings with women. Without lawyers and court determinations and orders how could couples ever reach divorce settlements? In the old days there was no need for such arrangements because there was no divorce or it was very rare. In the old days it was frequently the women who were mightily abused. This was true even in the highest circles of society, as a reading of *Anna Karenina* so graphically informs us now. Little wonder, then, that women have turned to the law for protection and claimed as rights what they frequently could not gain as moral obligations from their spouses.

The recourse to rights rather than to duties and moral obligations reflects a wholesale shift in advanced societies from morality to legality. As we come to trust each other less and less and as we no longer rely on people's character and its inherent virtues, so the law steps in to regulate relations between people. This is all the more the case as people have to deal with institutions, both private firms and public bodies, and as such institutions have to deal with each

other. As societies become more and more impersonal in the transactions that have to be carried out, so moral issues matter less and legal ones take priority.

All in all, the law tends to take the place of and becomes a substitute for morality. This is another instance of the kinds of substitution that take place through the whole ethos, which we will study in the next chapter. Our whole culture abandons its moral character and takes on a legal disposition in its place. This, as we shall soon see, has far reaching consequences on our own characters, on the kind of people we have become and what we now are as individuals.

Undeniably there have been immense improvements as a result of this transformation, and equally undeniably these have been of a moral kind. This is at the heart of the other side of the Austen paradox. In Austen's time and place there were horrendous social injustices being perpetrated by people who were frequently very moral and conscience-driven as individuals. At that stage of the Industrial Revolution people were being driven off the land by rapacious landlords, the gentlemen of the aristocracy, into the towns and factories owned by pious nonconformist industrialists, to be exploited in back-breaking labour; this was done to children as well as women and men. Many of the younger women were forced into prostitution just to survive. These are the kinds of facts of which Austen shows no awareness in her novels. For such social injustices Christian morality was no help and no amount of charitable endeavour was a remedy. Only reform movements, that is, political action and legislation, would eventually bring justice and a solution to social problems.

Obviously, nobody with any moral conscience would now want to turn back the clock to these bad old times of Austen's life-time. However, there are Chicago school economists who come closer to this view, such as Hayek and McClintock, who are proposing to leave workers to the vagaries of the labour market to earn as much or as little as the market will afford. But even such economic rationalists hold that there must be some safety net to prevent people falling to the very bottom of destitution. Just as obviously everyone should be afforded a large measure of legal protection and not be totally reliant on the moral good will of others or the kindness of strangers.

However, this is precisely what produces the Austen paradox. For the more people depend on law and appeal to legislation to secure their rights the less they rely on the moral behaviour of other people and the less they trust others in general. The more they resort to litigation to settle differences rather than reaching amicable resolutions, the less good will they show each other. The more the law becomes a technical mystery only accessible to lawyers and beyond ordinary moral sense, the less real justice plays a part. The more readily clever lawyers can win cases on technicalities, the more the law sides with the

rich against the poor, for clever lawyers are invariably very expensive. In short, the more people rely on law, the less morality matters. And if morality no longer matters, what is the point of appealing to moral considerations? Indeed, why be moral or bring up children to be so, since it is only bound to lead to bitter disappointments in life? And so, step by step, we reach the full force of the Austen paradox: in our enlightened and advanced societies, the more the law prevails and the more it is relied on, the less moral people become. Whereas in Austen's time it was just the other way round, at least in the sense that the law was cruel but people were enjoined to be kind.

This does not mean that morality is disappearing and that nobody knows what is right and wrong any more. This might be true for the lumpen-proletarians and criminal classes, found in the slums of Chicago for example, and in the Mafia-infested circles that Bellow complained about. It is not true for respectable classes where moral norms are preached but no longer relied on in practice. Morality has become like religion; people attend places of worship but no longer believe in what is preached there. Religion is like a sentimental heirloom, an expression of one's heritage and sense of belonging, but not to be taken seriously in the affairs of ordinary life where things matter. So it is with morality, whose validity and meaning for most people was once closely bound up with their religion.

But the more something is maintained purely for sentimental reasons, the more cynicism it arouses. This is clearly apparent in religious matters where the scandals associated with clerics of all kinds of faith provoke a knowing shrug of the shoulders and a sardonic laugh: "You know how it is", which McCloskey maintains is characteristic of Illinois as well as Italy. This is also how malfeasance in high places is greeted: "It is just politics, what can you expect". The people who say this will continue voting for the same crooked candidates. In America this kind of attitude used to be confined to Tammany Hall and to places like Mayor Daley's Chicago. Now it has become more commonplace and affects all elections, including those for the highest office.

And this is where the great danger lies, for if morality is discounted and discarded and people look for legal protection and their rights, they inevitably put themselves into the hands of the politicians, judges and policemen, namely, those who make the law, those who apply it and those who implement it. And if there are no moral scruples among the office holders and officials at any of those levels, there is serious trouble ahead for ordinary citizens. For even if the laws are good and the judges are just, but the police are corrupt, then all those at their mercy suffer. If the laws are good but the judges are biased as well, then there is even worse trouble for people. If the laws are bad, the judges biased and the police corrupt all at once, then a situation arises like that which the blacks

experienced in the old segregationist South. It is not to be suggested that this is the kind of injustice people any longer suffer in America, not even the blacks in the ghetto of Chicago. But it still happened in Bucharest at the time of Bellow's visit there. Europe remembers much better than America what happens to the law when there is a wholesale moral failure among those in authority. No doubt the laws on the books of the Rumanian judiciary were perfect under Ceausescu, just as they had been under Stalin in Russia. But those who invoked these laws were either very simple-minded or suicidal martyrs.

The people in Rumania did not put Ceausescu into power; he was imposed on them against their will, which was not true of the people in Germany who voted Hitler into office. They supported him enthusiastically even when he changed the laws and the constitution itself, which the previous regime of the Weimar Republic had promulgated. Under the Nazis, moral considerations no longer mattered, they were trumped by ideology. Most Germans went along with this and there are many excuses one can make for them; they had become temporarily demoralized because they had suffered a long series of calamities. Furthermore, Hitler was in power, and the very fact that Germans were so law-abiding prevented most of them from taking a moral stand against the new laws that were being enacted. This history should serve to illustrate that the law is equivocal, and that it all depends on who controls it and for what purpose; and in general, it is true that those who live only by the law perish by it. There are great dangers in relying on the law in situations where morality is allowed to decay. These are the dangers inherent in the Austen paradox at present in the twilight of a cultural dark age.

It is, of course, unpredictable how the Austen paradox will work itself out in America or in Europe for that matter. But one cannot be too sanguine about it. For though the laws are good and uphold basic rights; and invariably they are justly applied and enforced; yet there are very troubling signs of demoralization in evidence. All we can do here is to briefly outline some of these, and for this we must turn to sociologists rather than writers.

As reported by sociologists and social psychologists, the signs are not good. The reliance on trust is rapidly and precipitately declining in American private and public life. Shoshana Zuboff reports worrying survey statistics to this effect:

According to the US General Social Survey's continuous measurement of "interpersonal trust attitudes", the percentage of Americans who "think that most people can be trusted" remained relatively steady between 1972 and 1985. Despite some fluctuations, 46 percent Americans registered high level of interpersonal trust in 1972 and nearly 50 percent in 1985. As

the neoliberal disciplines began to bite, that percentage steadily declined to 34 percent in 1995, just as the public internet went live. The late 1990s through 2014 saw another period of steady and decisive decline to only 30 percent.¹⁵

As Zuboff goes on to point out, “societies that display low levels of interpersonal trust also tend to display low levels of trust toward legitimate authority; indeed, levels of trust toward the government have also declined substantially in the US ...”¹⁶ In 1958 more than half of Americans said they trusted the government all or most of the time; this figure went down to 45 percent in 1985, and 20 percent in 2015 and was only 18 percent in 2017. Trust is, of course, crucial to how people relate to each other morally and to how they deal with authorities. To realize how crucial trust is to morality one only has to look at China, where levels of trust are at rock bottom. Zuboff quotes Amy Hawkins as stating that “to be Chinese today is to live in a society of distrust, where every opportunity is a potential con and every act of generosity a risk of exploitation.”¹⁷ Most Chinese people only trust those few well-known to them; all others are looked on with suspicion and anxiety. As Zuboff points out, this is the obvious consequence of the past history of totalitarianism that “dismantled traditional domains of affiliation, identity and social meaning – family, religion, civil society, intellectual discourse, political freedom ...”¹⁸ These are, of course, the social basis of enlightened morality.

The solution that the Chinese government has adopted is to rely on even more stringent laws and a new way of rating people called the social credit system. This builds on traditional Chinese practices of group surveillance and group responsibility, but it adds to these an automatic component through high technology instruments, such as omnipresent surveillance cameras, face-recognition programs and all other such electronic measures. But far from solving the problems created by a lack of trust and morality, it will only aggravate them and lead to an Orwellian society. The Chinese Government’s measures to create trust are actually destroying it, as Hawkins writes:

But rather than promoting the organic return of traditional morality to reduce the gulf of distrust, the Chinese Government has preferred to

15 Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism, The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (London: Profile Books, 2019), 383–4.

16 Ibid, 384.

17 Ibid, 389.

18 Ibid, 389.

invest its energy in technological fixes ... and it is being welcomed by the public fed up with not knowing who to trust ... in part because there is no alternative.¹⁹

One could well imagine the American public also welcoming such technological measures if the level of trust keeps on dropping. Banks and insurance companies already employ systems of credit worthiness. Surveillance cameras are already ubiquitous in all cities. Face-recognition and automated algorithms are already in the hands of the police. Zuboff calls this whole system “surveillance capitalism” and she astutely notes that “despite the much-touted social advantages of always-on connection, social trust in the US declined precipitously during the same period that surveillance capitalism flourished.”²⁰ Ordinary Americans are also rapidly turning to technology to make up for the growing lack of trust. Since lawyers are expensive and not always to be trusted, many prefer to use software to perform professional services and settle their differences, as Guy Standing reports:

In 2014, 48 million Americans use online software rather than professionals to do their tax returns ... eBay and Pay Pal process over 60 million disagreements each year using “online dispute resolution” software that helps settle disputes without lawyers.²¹

However, the same kinds of technology that are being relied on to make up for the lack of trust are the very ones that are causing it. The founders of the eponymous internet companies relied on the trust of people in order to betray it, as Roger McNamee, himself one of the early pioneers, states in the very opening of his exposé book:

This is a story about trust. Technology platforms, including Facebook and Google, are the beneficiaries of trust and goodwill accumulated over fifty years by earlier generations of technology companies. They have taken advantage of our trust, using sophisticated techniques to prey on the

¹⁹ Ibid, 389.

²⁰ Ibid, 383.

²¹ Guy Standing, “Taskers in the Precariat: Confronting Emerging Dystopia”, in Eva Paus, *Confronting Dystopia: The New Technological Revolution and the Future of Work* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 126.

weakest aspects of human psychology to gather and exploit private data and craft business models that do not protect users from harm.²²

The founders of these technologies “set out to create habits, evolved habits into addictions, and laid the groundwork for massive fortunes.”²³ Their main concern was, of course, fortune and nothing was allowed to stand in their way of getting it. The whole story of the creation of Facebook is a sorry “tale of sex, money, genius and betrayal”, as the subtitle of Ben Mezrich’s book, from which the popular film “The Social Network” was made, puts it.²⁴

But it is not so much how these companies were set up that matters; most big companies had a sordid start; rather it is the effect they have had on their users and society in general that matters. According to McNamee, “the Facebook-dominated social media/attention economy revolution masked an unmitigated disaster for our democracy, for public health, for personal privacy, and for the economy”.²⁵ But above all, it is the damage to trust and morality that has been the most pernicious effect. It has launched the era of fake news, of information bubbles in which people are immured, of fake personas and even whole made-up personalities, of friendships that can be terminated at the click of a button, of seduction of the innocents and much more besides. The full effects of such development are not yet apparent; it is the next generation that will know all about them.

These are but the latest stages of a long-term trend in American society and culture that might be called de-moralization, not in the literal sense of a loss of morals, but better put, a waning of the sense that morals matter. Demoralization in this sense means that morality becomes purely a private preserve that some people choose to abide by and others to varying degrees disregard and discount. It is much the same as with aesthetics, where some people still prefer classical music to pop music or jazz or rap or whatever else. Those who still keep to the old moral proprieties are now frequently looked on as fools and suckers by those who refuse to be bound by such restrictions when it is a choice between succeeding or failing: deceiving a buyer so as to make a profitable deal or missing out, being elected on a false promise or a calumny against an opponent or being beaten, and so on. Those who resort to

22 Roger McNamee, *Zucked: Waking up to the Facebook Catastrophe* (London: Harper Collins, 2019), 2.

23 Ibid, 43.

24 Ben Mezrich, *The Accidental Billionaires: The Founding of Facebook – a Tale of Sex, Money, Genius and Betrayal* (London: William Heinemann, 2009).

25 Roger McNamee, *Zucked*, op. cit, 3.

such underhand means to win are no longer thought any worse for it by the general public. There is no righteous anger directed against them, just a weary cynicism: what McCloskey calls “the Chicago way” prevails. But once morality becomes a matter of choice, socio-culturally considered demoralization has set in. How this has come about historically is what we need to consider.

4 Demoralization, a Short History

The demoralization of American society has been a gradual long-term process of well over a century, starting many decades before the First World War. It is sociologically coextensive with industrialization, the mass market, urbanization, the break-down of communities and in the long-term the breakdown of the family. This does not mean that these are the sole causes of demoralization, but they certainly provide the social conditions in which it can easily take place. It is a delayed effect of the many changes over this whole period in American society that sociologists have been studying since the 1950s. Perhaps the very first such work is David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*.²⁶ This book opened up a new vein of rich sociological ore that many others have been mining ever since. We shall briefly examine James Coleman's *The Adolescent Society*, Richard Sennett's *The Fall of Public Man* and Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism*.

Riesman's study of the changing generational pattern of personality types is a kind of saga of three generations covering the grandparents, the parents and the grandchildren down to the 1950s. The grandparents were what Riesman calls tradition-directed types. They came from the small communities of a still mainly rural America which were largely rooted in a traditional slowly changing past. Morality and religion featured strongly in their lives, and they could not easily adjust to change. Their children, the parents, were inner-directed types for whom family, community and their moral upbringing mattered. It made them into people subject to their own inner conscience and its promptings and turned them into self-reliant and resolute characters. But at the same time, they were adaptable and better able to cope with change for they were highly self-disciplined and self-motivated. Their children in turn, the grandchildren, were other-directed types who no longer looked inside themselves to determine what they ought to do or what they ought to be like, but to the

26 David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950).

people around them. They were the new generation of conformists in a newly affluent society. Hence, they were subject to the pressures of their peer-group, their associates and the mass media. They were more intent on adjustment than self-affirmation.

For this generation the propensity to be subject to peer-group pressure already begins early in life in their schooling, as James Coleman revealed in a sociological study of 1961.²⁷ The school culture promoted by the students themselves serves to create what Coleman called "the leading crowd" in each school and classroom, the group that dictates what is good and bad and how young people should behave. Belonging to the leading crowd is uppermost in the social ambitions of most of the pupils. To do so, what matters for boys is sporting prowess and for girls it is popularity with other girls and boys. Scholastic achievement, which is what their parents extol, is of minor concern, and can even become counter-productive if it clashes with the requirement to fit in with the crowd. This requirement easily superseded the authority of teachers, parents and religious bodies outside the school as to what values should obtain and how one is to conduct oneself. Moral education is, therefore, almost non-existent in state schools, which the great majority attend.

Both Riesman's and Coleman's work precede the disruptive effect of the youth counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s. This, in a sense, constitutes a fourth generation in the development of the American personality type, and a further stage in the demoralization of American society. It is addressed in the works of Sennett and Lasch. The latter is psychologically more acute than the former, whereas the former's historical scope is much wider. Although it was published a few years later we shall look at Lasch's work first before Sennett's.

Lasch's book records a much further stage in demoralization than the earlier sociologists register, as it portrays a personality type that is the product of a pathological culture, that of cultural narcissism. This fourth generation, in our genealogy of ideal-types of cultural characters is symptomatic of the youth movements and self-esteem cults of the 1960s and 1970s.²⁸ The social conduct in which such developments flourish is characterized by the rejection of moral authority and moral responsibility in favour of a therapeutic approach to wrong-doing and social problems. People brought up under this kind of socio-cultural regimen are marked by contradictory needs and cravings: a need for closeness and warmth and at the same time a fear and refusal of personal commitment; a sense of mere possibility and inner emptiness coupled

²⁷ James Coleman, *The Adolescent Society* (Glencoe IL: Free Press, 1961).

²⁸ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in the Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1979).

by passionate intensity and rage; apparent knowingness and self-insight yet a failure to grasp reality and one's own situation; both amiability and hostile suspicion in relation to others, and so on. Lasch claims that people who are the products of a society of cultural narcissism and who experience an overriding need to boost their ego fall prey to the media and advertising, which offer them easy and shallow means to satisfy their longings. They constitute what Tom Wolfe called the self-obsessed "me generation".

These developments in demoralization are but the latest of a trend among youth in America after the Second World War that took off among the so-called Baby-Boom generation of the 1960s. A hedonistic culture of drugs, sex and rock-and-roll came to the fore. The old bourgeois virtues of delayed gratification, self-discipline, restraint, temperance and prudence were shunned. The mass media glamourized and amplified these trends, opposition to the war in Vietnam made them seem virtuous, as did support for the civil rights movement. It seemed like an individualistic revolt against the old-time authority of parents, teachers, pastors and priests, but actually it was more a case of allowing peer pressure to dictate what one should think, like, do and even wear. The blue-jeans uniform of the young became almost as obligatory as any of the older-style uniforms. In their very rebellion the young were as conformist to the dictates of their group as their parents had been previously to their authorities.

Lasch did not live to see a further stage in the devolution of narcissistic culture, that of the narcissism of self-exposure on the World Wide Web. The internet has provided new possibilities of self-aggrandizement undreamt of by previous narcissists. Andy Warhol's dictum that in the future everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes has become literally true. On Facebook or any of the other social media platforms anyone can become a world star and gather millions of so-called followers provided that one is willing to show and display oneself to them in the full nudity of body and soul. "Let it all hang out" is how the pseudo-psychic jargon terms it. At the same time as revealing all the intimate truths about oneself, one can broadcast whatever lies one cares to make up about anybody else. Under cover of complete anonymity that encryption affords one need no longer worry about consequences or fear retribution. Hence, one can be totally irresponsible in what one broadcasts. There is no longer any question of any kind of scruples or any other kinds of moral restraints.

To study the social background of mass psychological conditions of this type, we turn now to Sennett's book *The Fall of Public Man*, which was published only a few years before the book by Lasch that we have just discussed.²⁹

29 Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

Sennett anticipates Lasch in treating narcissism as predominately a social disorder of his time:

Narcissistic character disorders are the most common sources of the forms of psychic distress therapists now see. The hysterical symptoms which were the dominant complaints of Freud's erotic and repressive society have largely disappeared. This character disorder has arisen because a new kind of society encourages the growth of its psychic components and erases a sense of meaningful social encounters outside its terms, outside the boundaries of the single self, in public.³⁰

But for Sennett the narcissism is not the main point, it is the "sense of meaningful social encounters", the public life, that his book is largely about. Thus, his focus shifts away from social psychology and even from demoralization towards what might be called de-civilization. Sennett takes this in the literal sense of a loss of civility, and civility, as he points out, is the root meaning and basis of civilization.

Decivilization occurs because of the "end of public culture"; the culture of city life as the context for the meeting and intercourse between strangers is coming to an end. Sennett draws a sharp contrast between social life in cities during the centuries of civilization and the lack of such interaction between people in the cities of our time. The transition from the one public situation to the other was centuries in the making, from the *ancient régime* in Europe to America after the Second World War. It is this trajectory that he traces in his historically informed sociology.

Sennett is not all that concerned with either morals or laws, but rather with manners in the eighteenth-century sense of *moeurs*. He defines this as follows:

Moeurs can be rendered in modern English as a cross of manners, morals, and beliefs. Eighteenth century writers use the word in a sense that terms like "value orientation", "role definition", and the rest of the sociologist lexicon cannot encompass; *moeurs* concerns the complete manner, the style a person possesses.³¹

It was precisely in this wide sense of *moeurs* that Voltaire wrote his famous *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*, published in 1756, which Sennett

30 Ibid, 8.

31 Ibid, 116.

unfortunately overlooks and as a result he fails to realize how closely his work relates to that of Voltaire. Voltaire's book traces the progress of European civilization from the time of Charlemagne to that of Louis XIV. The earlier book by Voltaire, *The Age of Louis XIV* presented the climax in this development in the *moeurs* of the court at Versailles, according to Voltaire the very height of the arts and graces of civilization, and the very start of the "great age of light", which is what we now call the Enlightenment.

Sennett's book takes off from the age of Voltaire and traces the opposite of this process, the de-civilization that results from the decay, decline and loss of *moeurs*. Sennett continues where Voltaire leaves off and shows by what stages the civility, which was the basis of the society of the Enlightenment, becomes uncivilized over the succeeding centuries, to finally end up with the erosion of the public sphere of intercourse and discourse in the cities of America. It is largely a tale of three cities; Paris, London and New York.

Sennett tells his story not so much as a saga spanning numerous generations in the way that Riesman and his successors proceed to do, but rather as a history of three ages: that of the *ancient regime* prior to the French Revolution, that of the nineteenth century bourgeois society of the Victorian period, and that of the largely post-Second World War period of mass society and the affluent life-style. He presents his main thesis as the converse of that of Riesman:

I am turning around the argument David Riesman made in *The Lonely Crowd*. Riesman contrasted an inner-directed society, in which men pursued actions and made commitments based on goals and sentiments they felt within themselves, to an other-directed society, in which these passions and commitments depend on what people sense to be the feelings of others. Riesman believed American society, and in its wake Western Europe, was moving from an inner- to an other-directed condition. The sequence should be reversed. Western societies are moving from something like an other-directed condition to an inner-directed condition – except that in the midst of self-absorption no one can say what is inside.³²

In that exception lies the rub. Now the inside of most peoples' subjectivity is like that of the narcissistic personality that Lasch describes; it is pervaded by a sense of emptiness and lack, with feelings of unspecifiable dissatisfaction, with needs for closeness and warmth. It is not what is present inside Riesman's

³² Ibid, 5.

inner-directed type, which has more of the moral character of a strong sense of conscience, self-discipline and self-determination. There is all the difference in the world between Austen characters and Bellow characters. So, Sennett and Riesman are largely talking at cross purposes.

All the sociologists we have discussed helped us to grasp and unravel the Austen paradox and the complex interactions between manners, morals and law that have arisen over the last few centuries, the period covered in Sennett's work. He is correct in depicting it as a growing civil decay, an encroaching incivility of public life that is a prime symptom of de-civilization. It is in this sense that we are moving beyond civilization as we defined this in Chapter 1. This takes a cultural form not only in terms of morals, manners and law but also in terms of all the other manifestations of culture. We can speak of this as the whole way of life or ethos, which is perhaps what Sennett means by *moeurs*. It is in this sense that we shall try to answer the question: what are the *moeurs* of contemporary societies.

The Death of Culture

1 Sport as Surrogate Culture

It is very likely that never in human history have there been so many treatises, essays, theories and analyses focused on culture as there are today. This fact is even more surprising given that culture, in the meaning traditionally ascribed to the term, is now on the point of disappearing. And perhaps it has already disappeared, discreetly emptied of its content, and replaced by another content that distorts its earlier meaning.¹

The full meaning of Vargas Llosa's statement will only become apparent when we have examined not only what he calls "the death of culture" but also what has come to replace it. What is it that now substitutes for culture? What are the surrogates that now play a similar role in society to the one previously exercised by culture? We begin by looking at spectator sport as one of those simulacra of culture.

Sport holds a very important place in advanced industrial societies, one that few sociologists have noted or attempted to explain, and hardly any of them have grasped its cultural role, or better put, its role as a surrogate for culture. In assessing this role, we must focus not so much on the playing of games, but much more so on watching what others to do as spectators in vast crowds: focussing, that is, on sport as spectacle. Most of the current sociology of sport, a relatively new sub-discipline, is concerned with the players and not so much with the onlookers. But culturally considered it is the latter who are more noteworthy than the former. Children play all the sports that adults play, but they do not attract crowds on a regular basis; theirs is a pastime that can easily be left to the anthropologists and psychologists to account for. Not so with the sporting spectacles that their fathers attend and in lesser numbers their mothers as well, for that far transcends the playing of games in its ritual meaning and cultural significance. It is a curious set of rituals, into which children have to be inducted, especially if they are boys, often by being dragged to see a match whether they like it or not. In former days this was the case with

¹ Mario Vargas Llosa, *Notes on the Death of Culture: Essays on Spectacle and Society*, trans. John King (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), 1.

the spectacle of public executions, or perhaps even closer to the mark, gladiatorial games.

Just how curious and peculiar this is, can be gleaned if we take football as our primary example of sport-watching. Let us imagine someone from a totally different culture – if such a person still exists at present, or better still from another century, if time-travel were possible – attending a Cup Final match in a large stadium before a crowd of 100,000 spectators. What would such a person make of what is going on? Apart from being utterly bewildered, how might such a person take it and make sense of it? The most obvious explanation would be that this is some kind of weird ritual of a totally unknown religion. An Aztec remembering his own religious ball game of *ollamalitzli* might wonder why the losing team is not sacrificed and eaten as soon as the match is over. A Roman would be intrigued by the fact that no emperor is present to preside over these games, which he must have surely paid for, or why the crowd does not acclaim him. A Greek would suppose that this must be a funeral rite for some dead hero. A medieval knight might imagine that this was some very crucial and decisive trial by ordeal for a very noble lady or queen accused of the highest crime, adultery perhaps. A great military commander from a past heroic age might surmise that this was a combat engagement of some sort carried out by two teams of champions to settle some dispute, in order to avoid all-out war and bloodshed by the two armies of spectators. One could engage in numerous such imaginary speculations depending on how far back one delved into the past.

Obviously, all such views from the past are wrong for this is not what football is about. It is not a religious ritual for it carries no meaningful significance: the two sides represent no warring powers, no gods or demons are invoked, no mythic events are re-enacted, nobody is sacrificed, much less eaten, except purely metaphorically. It is not a political spectacle performed to serve the interest of rulers, no president is there to be acclaimed by the crowd, no liturgical largess is required because nobody pays the expenses of staging the match. It is not games enacted in celebration of anything, nobody is honoured or extolled by it. It is not a judicial process, even though there are umpires and laws to be applied, adjudicated and enforced. It is not a symbolic battle for no blood is shed, except by accident, and the winners gain nothing, no territory, no slaves, no spoils – except for prize money and increases in salary. Those in the crowd certainly get nothing out of it. All our ghostly visitors from the past have so amusingly misinterpreted football because they have likened it to the playing of games and staging of ritual contests with which they are familiar from their own societies and this has been very misleading.

Nevertheless, the interpretations of the witnesses from the past would not be completely wrong for there are vague vestigial elements in football matches that in a dim and very distant way correspond to aspects of these imaginary explanations. Contemporary sociologists have offered very different explanations of what is going on, and we shall consider two of them, in particular, those of Norbert Elias and Elias Canetti. Both were German-Jewish refugees in England, resident in London, but who were utterly unknown to each other, and both wrote on football without being at any time aware of each other's work. Elias' work is, of course, well known in the sociology of sport because he, together with his student Eric Dunning, was the founder of this speciality, but Canetti's contribution has been completely ignored. In what follows we shall critically consider both of them together for they both have different things to offer which both complement and run counter to each other. But before we outline what they have to say, we must spell out the crucial question that needs answering if we are to account for this puzzling phenomenon of mass spectatorism which is so unprecedented in the past.

These questions are in line with the one that Stephen Mennell asks at the start of his outline of Elias' view of sport: "What kind of society must it be, for people to so much enjoy the excitement and tensions engendered by physical contests where no blood flows and contestants do no serious harm to each other?"² But before we can even ask this question there are a number of prior ones we need to ask first in the same spirit. What kind of society must it be where so many crowds of men, for it is mostly men, are so fascinated by small teams of men chasing a ball? Why do they travel sometimes great distances to see this taking place, and do so regularly week by week, year after year, frequently over a life-time? Why do they care so much who wins and who loses and remember this ever after? What is in it for them? Why do they get so emotionally worked up during the match? Why do they jeer at and abuse the supporters of the side they oppose and sometimes come to blows over it? Why do they take out their anger on the umpire when he rules against their team? Why do they feel so elated when their team wins and depressed when it loses? Why do they identify with one team and wear its colours and insignia? Why do they talk about it and take pride in it throughout the years? Why do they watch replays of the match on television if they cannot attend in person? Why do whole nations do so in international competitions and react to wins or losses as if the national destiny depended on it?

2 Stephen Mennell, *Norbert Elias: Civilization and the Human Self-Image* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 141.

These are but some of the unusual manifestations that would have struck any observer from the past as indicating that we are a most peculiar people inhabiting an odd society. As we shall see, these phenomena of football and sports in general have no real parallels in history. They are the outgrowths of industrial societies that have much to do with the kinds of lives that masses of people – especially male workers in respect of football – lead in these societies. For these societies, and these alone, have evolved forms of mass entertainment – if this is even the right word for the intensity of feeling and engagement engendered – that no previous society required. What is it about industrial society that has made football such a fixture and led to its adoption throughout the world?

Elias' answer to this sociological conundrum is that the phenomenon of football is a product of civilization. Elias follows Freud in considering civilization to be synonymous with repression; the more civilized people are, the more repressed they become. They must learn to control their violent emotions, particularly their aggressive ones, and acquire self-discipline. They become pacified and polite. Good manners take the place of rough and aggressive treatment of each other. But at the same time their lives *en masse* become hemmed in, regulated, regular, and routinized – and boring. They need something to give them some excitement, a frisson of feeling in their otherwise placid and emotionally sterile existence. As Mennell states, quoting Elias:

In these societies, there is relatively little scope for showing strong feelings or strong dislike of people, let alone 'hot anger, wild hatred, or the urge to hit someone over the head': 'People strongly agitated, in the grip of feelings they cannot control, are cases for hospital or prison.'³

This is where football comes in to enable people to openly display the feelings they normally keep bottled up and repressed:

In the same way, at a football match, spectators savour the mimetic excitement of a battle swaying to and fro on the field, knowing that in this battle little real harm is likely to befall either the players or themselves. Torn between hopes of success and fears of defeat, they openly manifest their feelings in the company of many other people, something which is all the more enjoyable and liberating because in society at large people

³ Ibid, 141.

are more isolated and have few opportunities for collective manifestations of feelings.⁴

Elias calls this a situation in which “a controlled and enjoyable decontrolling of restraints on emotion is permitted”.⁵ Basically, this is a safety-valve type of explanation invoking a mechanism for the release of repressed emotions when the pressures of inhibition become too great. It is vaguely reminiscent of Aristotle’s theory of purgation whereby in dramatic performances, such as tragedies, feelings of pity and terror are aroused and vented and the consequent relief felt is presumably good for the soul. Hence, Elias has no hesitation in likening football to drama and other mimetic arts and calling the emotions aroused in both cases “mimetic feelings”. According to Elias the mock battle of the game is just like the dramatic conflict in a tragedy.

There is much that is questionable in Elias’ account, beginning with his overall theory, derived from Freud, that civilization means repression and that good manners are the techniques of emotional restraint acting like brakes on emotions running out of control. This touches on his whole idea of the civilizing process as a matter of inhibitions becoming ever more severe throughout history; this is highly questionable for it is not subject to empirical proof. As we have dealt with this view of history elsewhere, we shall not discuss it any further here.⁶ The view that football is a mimetic activity like drama and that it can achieve the purging of excessive emotional pressures also needs to be questioned. Aristotle’s theory of purgation does not provide a very good account of why we enjoy tragedy, and neither does Elias’ safety-valve theory explain why we enjoy football. Quite apart from any other difficulties, the very idea of calling both tragedy and football mimetic has something objectionable about it. Football is a contest between two teams, but does not resemble or imitate political struggle or its culmination in battle, any more than chess does, even though the names of the pieces are drawn from political conflict. Drama is a depiction of the complex human confrontation that precedes battle, as, for example, in *Lear* before the final showdown. In Greek and Roman drama, the battle takes place off-scene, or *obscena* in Latin from which our word obscene derives. In Shakespearean drama battles are staged purely as mummery, or a few gestures of dumb-show that only small children find exciting. Football has no more to do with drama than this kind of dumb-show does.

4 Ibid, 142.

5 Ibid, 142.

6 See Harry Redner, *The Tragedy of European Civilization*, op. cit, Chapter 3.

But this is not the worst aspect of Elias' account. He is even more mistaken in not clearly distinguishing between the excitement generated in the course of the play and the excitement generated in the spectators who watch it. These are very different types of feelings and are not to be identified. The players are certainly worked up during the match but in a purely controlled professional way. They are as much stimulated by playing against equally matched opponents, regardless of whether anyone is watching them or not, as they might be in a practice match or one that is not part of the regular competition. On the other hand, a single spectator or a small group scattered across the stadium will feel almost no excitement at all, or only a feeling of admiration for the finer points of play or football skill, which is almost a connoisseurship experience for aficionados, like watching a chess game or a game of football on television when one has no idea who the teams are – that is, purely as a detached observer. These are dispassionate feelings of appreciation that are far from the aroused excitement and frenzy that football barrackers normally experience during matches. It is clear that Elias has underplayed and not properly taken account of the role of the crowd, for the larger the crowd the better, in generating emotions in the spectators. Without that worked up crowd, the spectators would not experience such excitement. It helps to stir the players up to hear the roar of the crowd around them, but they can play just as well without it. But for the spectators the crowd is absolutely essential in generating their experience. Without crowds the phenomenon of spectatorism could not exist; football would be like a game for children or like table tennis at which nobody gets very excited for only few people can watch it.

At this point we turn to another author for whom the crowd is indeed, all important – Canetti. Canetti achieves the remarkable literary feat of discussing football without mentioning it by name. Instead, he describes the arena or stadium and the crowd that gathers within it, for this is what he wishes to emphasize:

The arena is well demarcated from the outside world. It is usually visible from far off and its situation in the city – the space which it occupies – is well known. People always feel where it is, even if they are not thinking of it. Shouts from the arena carry far and, when it is open at the top, something of the life which goes on inside communicates itself to the surrounding city.⁷

7 Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 27.

Canetti does not mention football, though this is undoubtedly what is happening inside the arena, because he is indifferent to what goes on there, as long as it serves to form a crowd. The crowd forms, not for the sake of football, but for the sake of becoming a crowd; the football game is merely the occasion or really the pretext for a crowd to assemble. The crowd, according to Elias, is not just a large group of people seated around the large circular enclosure or ring, it only really comes into being when what he calls the discharge takes place, and "the discharge must take place inside the arena"; and that happens at some point when the common excitement communicates itself to all the spectators and they all come to feel as one; only then is the crowd thereby constituted. This is how he describes it:

Every spectator has a thousand in front of him, a thousand heads. As long as he is there, all the others are there too; whatever excites him, excites them; and he sees it. They are seated some distance away from him, so that the differing details which make individuals of them are blurred; they all look alike and they all behave in a similar manner and he notices in them only the things which he himself is full of. Their visible excitement increases his own.⁸

According to Canetti, individuals lose themselves in the crowd; they lose their own individuality in a quite literal sense and become one in a higher collective being, which is the crowd:

There is no break in the crowd which sits like this, exhibiting itself to itself. It forms a closed ring which nothing can escape. The tiered ring of fascinated faces has something strangely homogeneous about it. It embraces everything that happens below; no-one relaxes his grip on this; no one tries to get away ... the crowd is doubly closed, to the world and to itself.⁹

Out of these transfixed individuals a higher collectivity or social organism is formed which has its own will and purpose and strives to keep itself in being for as long as possible. It has a life of its own distinct from the individuals who constitute it.

⁸ Ibid, 28.

⁹ Ibid, 28.

Canetti establishes a number of principles of crowd psychology, as it were of the being that emerges from the crowd, which is quite different from that of the individuals who constitute it: "the crowd always wants to grow; within the crowd there is equality; the crowd loves density; the crowd needs a direction", and so on.¹⁰ People strive to join crowds precisely to be transported out of themselves, to be released from their individual identity, their conscience, their rational mind, and all the other inhibiting measures that society imposes on them, and thereby isolates each one in a solitude from which they all seek to escape. In the crowd they can behave in ways that are the opposite to those that society expects of them, for a crowd is like a rampaging beast that loves to run amok, to break, kill and destroy since the crowd is bound by no moral inhibitions or restraints. Hence is the attraction of crowds for so many in our advanced modern societies, where each individual is isolated more than ever before, or so Canetti surmises. Being a great writer, Canetti has undoubtedly crafted some very vivid depictions and coined some apt metaphors, but whether his explanations are sociologically convincing is another matter altogether.

Elias would be understandably appalled by this kind of writing coming from Canetti. He would rightly object that the people in the arena or stadium are there to watch a football match, which Canetti completely leaves out of account, not to form a crowd. For people like them or even the very same people behave and feel very differently depending on what takes place there. They might be attending an evangelical revival meeting, or Catholic mass, or a concert of brass band music, or a rock concert or a military parade, or a political party rally, or any other of the various functions for which stadiums can be utilized. In all of these, people might be seated as in a football match, but they constitute very different crowds. These collectives are not the same; each is determined by what goes on in the arena. The whole tone, feeling and mood changes from one activity to another; what goes on does, indeed, matter to determine the kind of crowd that arises.

It is football and football alone that encourages the kind of crowd phenomena that Canetti describes. It is, as it were, part of the culture of football that the spectators should take sides and form not the one, but two opposed crowds and then engage each other in partisan barracking which can easily get out of control and degenerate to mutual abuse, jeering, missile throwing and hooligan violence. And it is true that many of the spectators enjoy this part of the game perhaps even more than the game itself. It is also true that without this

10 Ibid, 29.

whiff of danger and frisson of fear football would be a boring business and become more like cricket. Cricketing crowds are usually quiet and extremely well behaved, especially in England and even more so at Lords oval in London, where gentlemen cricketers meet.

This brings us to the main thrust of our investigation which turns on this question: why is it that in advanced industrial societies, largely during the twentieth century, the culture of football and that of many other ball sports, such as rugby, gridiron or American football or Australian rules football, or in alternate seasons cricket or baseball and later basketball and many others, developed and drew so many people. In fact, so many that huge crowd containers such as stadiums had to be built in cities, ones of a size not known since the Colosseum in Rome or similar arenas in other Roman cities. For only in Rome and the Roman Empire do we find anything that historically even begins to approximate to our modern obsession with sports like football and all the other games. The Roman games were, of course, utterly different for they were gladiatorial combats, wild beast hunts, mock sea-battles, and other such violent spectacles, interspersed with the occasional executions of criminals, including (very rarely) executions of Christians martyred for their beliefs. Nor were the chariot races in the Circus Maximus like our horse races. There are, however, some evident similarities. This prompts the question of what it is that Rome and the other major metropolises of the Roman Empire have in common with cities in our modern world.

One obvious relationship, which the Marxists have made us aware of, is the existence in both of a proletariat. Of course, they are well aware that the word means one thing in the Roman context and something very different in that of modern industrial cities. In Rome and the provinces to a lesser degree it meant a class of indigent poor whose basic needs had to be supplied by the state and who were only capable, as the word suggests, of multiplying themselves. In the modern context it means a working-class employee in factories, workshops and mines or other industries, earning enough to have an excess amount to spend on leisure and pleasure. And these, in fact, constitute the major portion of men who attend matches. Until recently there were few others, for generally women kept away, unlike at the games in Rome, and the indigent were too poor to afford admission. Only later did the middle classes and even some from the upper classes join in, for these classes generally preferred cricket. In Rome the whole society was on display as the class hierarchy was there from the start, and from the start segregated according to rank by the seating arrangements. These are crucial differences in accounting for the role that the games played in Rome, as opposed to our own sports.

The Roman games began as religious ceremonial activities, much like those of the Greeks, such as the funeral games recorded in Homer's *Iliad*. But eventually with the onset of empire, they assumed a political role. They became a way for the emperors to display their generosity and to show themselves to the people and be acclaimed by them. When citizenship no longer entailed any political power, this kind of acclamation took on a legitimating function. The emperor also displayed his absolute power by granting life or death to the gladiators in accord with the crowd's shouted verdict. There was a mutual rapport between emperor and crowd established at the games that occasionally gave the latter license for a certain amount of political criticism in the form of jeering. The factions at the chariot races much later in Byzantium assumed a more direct political role, and at times were a threat to the emperor himself, as in the Nika riots during Justinian's reign, which nearly brought him down.

Sports play no such political role in our societies, at least not yet. And that prompts the crucial question: what role do sports such as football play in our advanced modern societies? To establish this, we must recall the origins of football and the other sports and trace the historical vicissitudes by which they arrived in the stadiums of our crowded cities. Football began all over Europe as a folk pastime carried on as a competitive game between villages or between apprentices and other young men in towns and cities, like that of the Italian *calcio*, which still survives. In England such a folk football was considered extremely common in the sense of vulgar, as when in *Lear* Kent refers to Oswald, whom he has tripped up, as a "base football player" – there were as yet no rules governing foul play. This was the first stage in the history of this sport, which was different from the original stage of other sports, some of which, such as tennis, had noble antecedents! The second stage occurred when these old rural or noble pastimes were taken up by the schools and colleges of England and later America. Thus, as is well known from *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, a novel by Thomas Hughes published in 1857, and other such popular Victorian literature, Dr Arnold the headmaster of Rugby, a so-called public school for the upper classes, introduced a ball game, later called rugby, as part of his character-building educational project – under the mistaken belief that the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton. On the playing fields of Eton, they played a ball game closer to what later became soccer or our present football.

The third stage took place a little later in the second half of the nineteenth century when sports such as football, played by young adult gentlemen, or so-called amateur sportsmen, became partly professionalized. This meant that they were open to all players, rules were enacted, and that competitions were set up between clubs as a regular fixture. These then began to be played for a

paying public. It was at this stage that working people were also attracted, both as ball players and spectators, to what till then had been an affair of swells, toffs and posh boys. Once workers were rapidly drawn to football, this brought on the fourth stage of its evolution: complete professionalization as dedicated players performed for a paying public, which grew to such large numbers that stadiums had to be built to contain them. It is with this stage that the peculiar culture of football arose that both Elias and Canetti describe so one-sidedly.

This poses another crucial issue: why did largely working-class men take so eagerly and rapidly to a sport that had been an upper-class pastime for boys? One obvious answer is that it was a reminder of their rural or craft origins, which their fathers or grandfathers had only recently abandoned when they were driven off the land or away from trades into the factories, mines and other industrial enterprises. But that in itself would only be a sentimental regression to a barely remembered past, which could hardly account for the shift to the culture of football or that of other sports. Something far more significant and substantial had to be at work.

We have referred to the culture of football, but this is hardly a culture in any significant or substantive sense. It is rather a peculiar habitual practice that bears little resemblance to the cultures of the ancestors of the very working people who engaged in this sport, both as players and as spectators. Starting in England where the Industrial Revolution first occurred, the working class consisted of those who had been uprooted from the land or from the trades, crafts and other occupations of the cities as a direct result of dissolution of the guilds, land enclosures and other such economic developments associated with the growth of modern capitalism. As a result, not only did they lose their traditional forms of employment, they lost their traditional cultures as well. Since they could carry very few of their original traditions into the new suburbs of old and new cities, where the industrial process had herded them and concentrated them in large numbers. Only a memory of that culture still remained, for they had become culturally dispossessed and disinherited. In this stage of cultural penury, they sought for substitutes for what they had lost. All the more so as once their wages rose to give them enough excess money to buy entertainments, and as the rigours of work lessened and afforded them leisure hours to enjoy themselves.

Behind these sad facts lie the origins of so much of later Victorian popular culture, such as music hall and circuses, and also such non-cultural diversions as drink and football. Just like the music hall and the pub, the stadium and the football club became venues to which working men resorted for light relief from the heavy burden of work. At this point we will not discuss the music hall, which is certainly an artistic and cultural venue, featuring a huge variety of

musical and comic acts; nor will we refer to the circus, another popular mode, or to the early cinema which largely supplanted them both. We shall only be concerned with football and sport in general for these are not cultural in anything like the same sense.

The sociological importance of football is that it is perhaps the earliest of the substitutes for culture. It took the place of the culture that was missing. In other words, it was a surrogate for an absent culture, one of the many surrogates that arose and which we shall study in what follows. In particular, there were two kinds of cultural activities that had largely disappeared or been severely attenuated in industrial societies and had somehow to be compensated for, especially so in the lives of working men, those who would form the bulk of the football spectators. The first is religion and involved a yearly round of rituals and ceremonies and the cultural life associated with the church, unvaryingly repeating itself from year to year over the course of a life-time and from generation to generation with hardly any change. The second, equally unchanging, is the communal ethos with its yearly cycle of cooperative activities surrounding agriculture in the countryside or the trades and crafts and services in the towns, with their role differentials of landlord and tenant, master and servant or master and apprentice, involving oppositions and rivalries and ritualized forms of strife.

Industrialization and concentration of the working class in cities destroyed most of this traditional ethos. Men were no longer obliged to attend church services on Sundays or the yearly festive holidays, though in Victorian England many still did so. Nor did they any longer engage in the communal activities associated with the traditional ways of life. Their identities and sense of Self were no longer firmly anchored in a station of life with its duties, responsibilities and loyalties to others, both those of equal status as well as those above and below their level in the social hierarchy. As working-class labourers, packed closely together in city suburbs, their lives had lost much of its rhythm and rhyme and for some its very reason or *raison d'être*. So as not to become totally alienated and subject to utter *anomie*, they looked for substitutes for the culture that they had lost. As we shall see, many such surrogates arose, to which they eagerly took. We have already referred to the music hall, the circus and the pub and we shall go on to consider many others.

Football was one such for it offered what had been discontinued in the round of life. The regular weekly or fortnightly attendance at the match and the league fixtures throughout the sporting season leading up to the climax of the Cup Final carried distant echoes of the old religious observances. A partial sense of identity was restored through belonging to a football club and identifying oneself with it, in opposition to all those in the other clubs. It brought

some sense of community with it, as well, especially so in the early days of the game when all the men of the one locality or industry at a given place would be members and partisans of the one team; this was a local team that carried the name of the town or suburb to which they all belonged, a little like the village which their ancestors inhabited. This was nothing like religion or community in the old sense, but it was a partial substitute, the only possible one under the new circumstances, because for complex reasons to do with loss of faith, due to dislocation and industrialization, many men of the working class distanced themselves from Christian belief. This was even more the case on the Continent than in England, where the religious revivalists and the factory owners combined to instil religion into their employees. It was somewhat different for women who still flocked to the churches in greater numbers than men. In the continental European countries, women went to Church on Sunday, whereas men went to the stadium on Saturday.

The whole experience of attending matches over long periods established something like a football “culture”, though this was not a culture in any traditional sense. Arraying oneself in the garb, colours and insignia of the club; travelling to the stadium, sometimes for long distances as on a pilgrimage; the starting ceremony prior to the game itself at the stadium with the arrival of players and umpires; the marching bands and cheer leaders in America; the standing to attention for the national anthem – all this resonated with the participants. Then the play itself in which each barracker felt part of the faction (the word comes from the Latin *factions* associated with the chariot races) at war with the opposite faction, a battle of words and gestures and mock hatred that could easily get out of hand and degenerate to blows and real hatred (just as with the Roman factions). The word fan, short for fanatic was another synonym used that indicates the kinds of feeling that could be aroused and openly vented. The obligatory abuse hurled at the umpire also had a role in the incitement and diffusion of feeling, especially as the umpire stood in for the law and order, which could not otherwise be flouted. Then at the end of the match other kinds of emotion came into effect, with one side overjoyed, celebrating victory and feeling highly elated, and the losing side depressed, mourning defeat and feeling deflated. This might be followed by some spectators, especially the younger cohort, going on to drink and celebrate further, and perhaps a little hooliganism if the opportunity warranted it, and others taking out their frustration and rage on passers-by.

But this is not the end of the matter, for the effects of the experience continue throughout the week till the next match. Much time is spent reading about it in the sporting press with endless discussion, post mortem play analysis, recollection of glorious and shameful incidents, and so on. Television

viewing is another way of reliving the experience. No wonder people claim that football is a way of life. However, it is not what is meant by a cultural way of life, in the sense that it carries no meaning or message, no myth or metaphysics, and promotes no imaginative play or wonder, nor any of the things that culture entails. It offers many pleasures and experiences to spectators but they are evanescent. It is a passing pastime "full of sound and fury signifying nothing". It is a distraction that leaves nothing behind. The same is true for the whole of what is called sporting life, as indeed it is also true of drinking, drug-taking and gambling and many other activities in which masses of people indulge when they feel their lives are empty.

Our discussion of football introduces us to a key sociological concept, that of synthetic surrogates for culture or sham cultures, which play an increasingly important role in contemporary life. It was perhaps the first of these, appearing at the start of the twentieth century, after which as the century progressed many more would be concocted by the new electronic media, by advertising and what has come to be called the Culture Industry. For the more the old traditional cultures were evacuated from ordinary life the more synthetic cultures had to be devised to fill the void. Not only nature, but culture, too, abhors a vacuum. But these sham "cultures" are no more like real culture than what the Germans call *Ersatz Kaffee* is or tastes like the real coffee for which it was a war-time substitute. Thus, we shall coin the term *Ersatz Kultur* for sham "culture".

In fact, the substitution of sham "culture" for real culture is part of an ongoing process of replacing the natural by the artificial, as in utilizing plastics instead of natural materials and eating synthetic foods rather than natural foods. Obviously, this can occur to varying degrees, just as with foods. Few foods, as yet, are wholly synthetically derived from chemical ingredients; most are made from natural ingredients which are processed in many ways. The worst of these are the highly processed fast foods produced in vast quantities and sold at low prices generally to the poor and the young. The results are apparent from medical statistics of rising obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, coronary failure, etc. Consuming synthetic culture at a regular rate is as good for the soul and sensibility as eating fast foods is for the body. Unfortunately, this is what takes place as evermore traditional cultural practices and institutions are replaced by newly contrived ones coming out of the media factories of the entertainment businesses. Similar effects are also achieved by the introduction of new technological ways of apparently doing better what was previously done more simply and naturally, but resulting in something very different and far less beneficial.

2 The Sportification of Culture

Sport functions in society not only as a cultural substitute, an *Ersatz Kultur*, but also as a model for other more genuine cultural activities. These become imbued with a sporting spirit, that is, 'sportified', and pursued as if they were sports. This is particularly true of cultural spheres where crowds form on such a large scale that they are seen as examples of mass culture in a contemporary context. For what makes something more like sport is not that it is a game, but that it attracts crowds that are like the spectators of popular sports. In both cases it is not so much the nature of the activity itself that matters, as the crowds it attracts and their behaviour. In order to see clearly how these crowd phenomena operate, we need to introduce the concept of virtual crowds, which is an extension of the concept of real crowds.

In sport generally, as in football, for example, the real crowd is composed of the people who attend the match at the stadium. This constitutes a 'double-crowd', as Canetti terms it, of supporters on the two opposing sides who sit facing each other in the stadium; together they constitute a closed crowd, limited in size by the capacity of the stadium. However, apart from this real crowd, there is also a virtual crowd made up of all those watching the match on TV, usually sitting in isolation in their living rooms, or in small groups in bars clustering around the TV screen, or on their iPhones, or wherever else people watch the game. This virtual crowd is in some ways like the real crowd; in other ways it is different. People in the virtual crowd can still barrack for their own teams and get as emotional about the game as those in the real crowd, but usually they cannot interact with supporters from the other side; they cannot banter, tease, jeer, exchange insults or blows, as is the case with real crowds. Their experience as sporting spectators is somewhat attenuated but nevertheless genuine.

One important difference, however, is the potential size of the virtual crowd: it is far larger than the real crowd, and therefore as Canetti says: it is 'open' not 'closed'. In fact, its growth is unlimited; all those willing to tune into the match can join the crowd; their numbers can extend to millions, tens or even hundreds of millions, as in the case of the World Cup. Unlike a real crowd, furthermore, a virtual crowd can continue to exist after the match is over when the real crowd breaks up and all the spectators go home. The virtual crowd watching on TV lives on in replays of the game, which can be repeated for weeks, or in comment and analysis and press reports. In a more attenuated sense, the virtual crowd continues in existence whenever supporters get together to discuss the match.

A virtual crowd of supporters has in principle indefinite extension and indefinite duration, as new supporters can always enter. In practice, some measures of control and regulation are likely to be introduced, as when club membership is established and an organization is set up, thereby fixing the virtual crowd into a much more permanent arrangement. Like the members of a political party, the club members can be relied on to act in a much more predictable way than a disorganized virtual crowd of mere fans. They can also be guided and directed by officials or other such leaders. In these ways, mere crowd behaviour, whether of elation or deflation, of adhesion or detachment, of acceptance or refusal, becomes much more orderly and controllable. As we shall soon see, all these features of crowd behaviour in real and virtual crowds, repeat themselves in the cultural domain as much as in the political and every other domain in which large groups of people are involved, especially as when the numbers are so large as to constitute a mass, and what is now called mass behaviour arises.

It is rather odd that the great theorist of crowds, Canetti, never considered virtual crowds. He dealt only with real ones, such as those in football stadiums, ignoring crowds of fans or club members. Apart from such real crowds, the only other ones he discusses are those he calls invisible or unreal crowds, such as the crowd of the dead, that is, ghosts, or illusory crowds of demons and angels or other unreal beings.¹¹ By implication, he does consider virtual crowds when he discusses the crowd symbols of whole nations, but this is not theoretically developed. Perhaps the phenomenon of virtual crowds was not as salient in Canetti's time, the 1930s, when the media were not as culturally significant as now, prior to the invention of television, computers and the internet. As we shall see, the electronic media in particular are a potent means for creating virtual crowds. All the communication media that establish networks of connected people can of course promote crowd behaviour, but the mass behaviour fostered by the electronic media, above all, television and the Internet is the most extensive.

All types and forms of crowd behaviour can also be found in the cultural domain at present, and in this lies its similarity to sport. We shall take rock music as our primary example. The crowd at a rock concert has many features in common with the crowd at a football match, with the vital difference that it is a single unified crowd, rather than a double crowd of supporters of opposing teams. The concert crowd is extremely unified, in fact, for it is brought together by the rhythmic beat of drums and electronic guitars as it pulsates through

11 Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, op. cit, 63–67.

the bodies of the participants, setting their feet stomping, bodies swaying and hands waving. The singing, growling and shouting of the performers, electronically amplified, and their bodily gyrations on stage are communicated to the participants and they respond by yelling and screaming. Some swoon and go into hysterics as the waves of emotional excitement sweep over them. They enter into something akin to an orgiastic abandon, which is why less involved people refer to it as a craze or a mania. One of the principle aims of this kind of music is to create crowd phenomena of this type, just as the main aim in staging football matches is to draw crowds into stadiums. Both create experiences that masses of people in our societies, especially young people in the case of rock music, crave and are prepared to pay for. We have already discussed the reasons for this societal need in dealing with the opposed theories of Canetti and Elias concerning the popularity of football.

It is necessary to go beyond both these theorists and treat virtual crowds as a more important phenomenon than real crowds today. Rock music provides an even richer case for analysis than football, because fans can be extensively groomed and commercially exploited long before they become spectators of live performances and fuse with each other in real crowd experiences. The availability of recordings and media broadcasts and televised interviews with stars enables fans to identify with bands they may never hear perform live, and to construct life-style self-images by purchasing items associated with the star performers. As with rivalry between football clubs, which keeps their virtual crowds in being and gives a sense of illusory identity to their members, so too does rivalry between bands serve a similar purpose in the cultural sphere. Being a Beatles fan, for example, involves a different range of life-style and fashion choices than being a fan of the Rolling Stones: clothing, hair styles, bearing differ.

While this may look like the well-known and relatively harmless aspect of adolescent behaviour, known as peer group conformism, which enables young people to form their identities through membership in a range of real social groups, it can, in combination with other social pressures, create an addiction to membership in a diffuse and unreal virtual crowd, and expose them to ongoing, unlimited manipulation of their self-image. For the self-image sold to fans is transient, evanescent and superficial, unlike the self-image people traditionally construct through membership in real communal groups and institutions, such as clubs, churches and political parties. This is not to say that rock music culture which now has a seventy-year long history, necessarily creates such an addiction, only that it may and indeed has done so for many fans – witness the Elvis clubs that persist to this day. It is rather a matter of identifying the commercial pressures within that culture that lead fans to adopt whatever fashion

and admire whatever star performer currently commands a devoted crowd following, in order to support their own unstable self-image. A sadly doomed enterprise, for Schumpeter's law operates in rock culture, as in any commercial venture, the law of creative-destruction, according to which the old must be continually replaced by the new; and for people who crave reinforcement of their self-image by the crowd of fans with whom they have identified, this means they are continually threatened with 'self' obsolescence.

If we wish to understand the exponential growth of virtual crowds in contemporary society, and their importance in the global market of cultural products at every level, we need to grasp that the cultural content – whether it be a sporting activity or a musical style that is being used for mass entertainment – is actually less important than the means used to produce it, namely the entrepreneurial skills, the financial resources, mainly provided by advertisers, and the technologies available for disseminating these products. The role of Brian Epstein in moulding the raw talent – that the four Beatles undoubtedly possessed – into an image of youthful insouciance that would appeal to millions of fans is well documented. He decided on dress, manners, staging, photos, TV appearances: in short, the details that created their public personas, in much the same way that PR managers groom politicians before elections. The ultimate aim is different, success at the ballot box leading to real political power, rather than commercial success, bringing fame and wealth – the former provided for the politician by voters, the latter provided for the performers by the adoring buyers of concert tickets, recordings, and allied paraphernalia. However, sheer numbers are the *sine qua non* for both, and to achieve these the managers know that virtual crowds are indispensable.

The story of how the virtual crowd became indispensable to securing mass followings in the domains of sport, politics and art is a familiar one. The role of film and television as they competed for audiences in the second half of last century is an important part of that story, with Hollywood devising film content to suit star performers who were guaranteed to sell films regardless of their quality on the one hand, while on the other hand television companies pursued ratings by romanticising the mundane realities of viewer's everyday lives. In either case, personalities had to be cultivated with whom audiences could identify, whose personal lives were more interesting to them than the characters they portrayed, so audiences demanded to see the stars in the flesh occasionally. This created the interesting situation in which celebrities created by the media, who had a vast virtual following had to agree to be interviewed, go on tours and show themselves to admirers from time to time. On such occasions the virtual crowd would resolve itself into multiple real crowds,

temporarily. This complex interaction of real and virtual changed with the advent of the internet and social media.

In considering the consequences of this change, it is essential to keep the main features of crowd psychology in mind. As crowds form, they put pressure on individuals to join and to conform to the expectations of those already involved. Crowd behaviour thus resembles the flocking of birds or the herding of animals in the non-human world. The psychological gains are obvious; escape from the uncomfortable sensation of being different from others, and the accompanying isolation, accession to the sensation of power as part of a mass of like-minded people and the enhanced sense of personal identity that identification with this crowd of others confers. Consumer culture relies on this flocking behaviour, as people can only feel they are birds of a feather if they like the same things, enjoy the same entertainments, purchase the same products. Adolescents are particularly prone to flocking, due to their unstable identities and they are also particularly vulnerable consumers, with money to spend but unformed tastes and malleable needs. Advertisers strive to elicit such flocking behaviour in order to create both real and virtual crowds of consumers.

As we shall see, film and television taught the producers of internet-based entertainment and social media platforms three important lessons about how to create virtual crowds: first, develop a star system, so users can flock around celebrities; second, secure high ratings by focussing on real events like sporting competitions, quiz shows and news stories, creating blends of these often classified as 'infotainment'; third, invest heavily in youth, the most easily manipulated consumers. In the final two sections of this chapter, we will look more closely at how these lessons were absorbed over time by Hollywood and then by the producers of internet-based entertainment. Here we are intent on describing the growing importance of virtual crowds to the global reach and the commercial success of the electronic media – and the impact of this process on the arts.

By the 1970s, film producers were adept at manufacturing stars and had moved on to creating virtual crowds that young audiences considered exclusively their own, consolidating the escape from the family circle effected in the youth movements of the 1960s. They achieved this by basing films on the heroes of children's stories, such as comic book heroes, like Batman. Or they adapted high phantasy, adventure or science fiction into films with child heroes, such as "ET". Kevin Feige of Marvel Studios, for example, made twenty-five films starring comic book heroes, netting \$22 billion. Or, alternatively, they adapted best-seller children's fiction, such as the *Harry Potter* series, by J. K. Rowling, as well as versions of earlier children's classics, by C.S. Lewis and J.R.

Tolkien. In general, they found that the highest grossing films were those made for the youth market. Hollywood was also producing niche films for select adult audiences, of course, but at the same time they discovered that films made for youth audiences also appealed to most adults. Thus, the virtual crowd escaped its original age-related limits and swelled inordinately.

It would take the invention of the internet to take the creation of virtual crowds to a new level, in which consumers of 'infotainment' co-operate unwittingly with advertisers in serving their commercial interests. The most original move was made by inventors of social media. They realized that the star system invented by Hollywood and the celebrity culture fostered by television could be adapted, so that fans and followers could themselves become stars, and command a virtual crowd of their own. They were able, furthermore, to make the flocking process almost automatic. Facebook, for example, with nearly three billion subscribers extending across the globe, has created search engines that prompt people to make "friends" of strangers continually, with no more effort than the click of a mouse, thus constructing innumerable virtual crowds who feel they belong together and have no need for the reality check to which real stars were occasionally subjected. There is a key difference from the other communication media, however. The groups that form around individual users, the self-styled stars of social media, create so-called 'bubbles', which are hermetically sealed off from other groups of users and so are prone to rumour-mongering and fake news reports, leading to erosion of the distinction between truth and lies, with far-reaching social and political consequences. Neither the people with whom one may interact on social media or the content of the information they disseminate need be 'real'. We will pursue this insidious development in the final section of this chapter.

Meanwhile, another development with serious consequences was happening in the creative arts industries. Arts entrepreneurs and publishers soon learnt the lesson of how to use celebrity appeal to build crowd followings for artists and writers. Much of the popular literature at present is geared to the mentality and tastes of children and youth, even though it is also read by adults. Thus, literature has fallen into the same state as film and pop music, most of which have ceased being made with a mature audience in mind. This does not mean that literature, films or music for adults no longer exist, but rather that these have now become niche products and are not the main line of business. And to be successful even these have to follow certain well-established marketing strategies. Thus, for example, best-seller books for adults tend to deal with so-called "hot" topics, such as hard-core pornography or soft-core pornographic romance, or abstruse conspiracy theories generally touching on religious topics, or biographies of famous people or current celebrities. Most

readers of books being produced today will be able to fill in these categorical slots with relevant titles. Another sure-fire tactic for success is to utilize the names of well-known people as authors, for whom the appropriate texts can be ghost written completely or just appropriately “edited” if the authors can put pen to paper themselves. Authors of previous best-sellers are, of course, almost guaranteed high sales for their subsequent efforts; and if they have succeeded with a number of best-sellers in succession then they will have established a brand name and a loyal following of readers who will buy anything they produce, regardless of who actually writes it.

This does not mean that good books are no longer being written, merely that serious writers can no longer hope to become best-sellers as they could in former times, as they are forced to compete for an ever-decreasing number of serious readers. This competition has been institutionalized. Serious writers increasingly seek recognition through prizes and awards, and are sucked into a culture in which the relation between talent and success is inverted: one must first be a winner if one wishes to be credited with talent, even though for every winner there are losers whose talent will not be recognized. In this respect, literary competition now resembles sporting competition. This whole phenomenon might be considered the ‘sportification’ of art and is to be encountered not only in literature but in all the so-called “classical” or high-brow arts. It is particularly prominent among classical music performers where it is almost impossible to succeed without winning one or another of the renowned international competitions for instrumentalists and vocalists. There are similar competitions for architects where prizes are awarded for plans or complete buildings, as in the much-watched Kevin McCloud program “Grand Designs” on the BBC, where the contest is for the best house of the year. There are numerous other architectural awards and so-called ‘starchitects’ like Frank Gehring can win more than one hundred of these.

The sportification of art ensues not merely from the competitive spirit, which was never absent, but from the fact that artists must face off against each other in a specially staged contest, where a jury of judges or experts compares the one work with the other against certain standards or criteria, which they are presumed to have in common. This is much like what happens in sports where there are no objective targets or measures of who does best or who is the winner, but rather where qualitative features have to be determined by members of a judging panel who crown the winner according to the highest score on some points system, enumerating what counts as desirable or undesirable. This takes place in sports such as diving, figure skating, ballroom dancing and many others. It is much the same in artistic competition, as, for example, in the awarding of the Booker Prize or the Prix Goncourt. These have become so

common today that it is easy to overlook the fact that the quality of works of art was seldom judged by such procedures in the past, especially not where the literary arts were concerned. The only renowned example of such a thing was the annual Dionysian festival contests for the best tragedy in ancient Athens. This shared something of the competitive spirit of the *agon* that pervaded the Greek polis as a whole, another of whose expressions was the Olympic Games and other athletic contests held throughout the Classical world, dating back to the funeral games recorded in Homer and looking ahead to the gladiatorial games in Rome.

It is important to note that a seemingly similar competitive spirit began to pervade Western societies around about the time that the Olympic Games were revived in 1896 and when the first international football competition was established. This was also when the first and most important prize for literature, the Nobel Prize in 1901, was awarded and when the Venice Biennale of the arts was established in 1895. Its founder Riccardo Selvatico was inspired by the internationalization of football, according to James English: "In conceiving of the basic aims and contours of his new festival, it was the rise of international football he turned to."¹² English is the author of a book comprehensively examining the role of prizes and awards in what he calls the "economy of prestige". He notes how such a system of competitive contests has grown in the course of the twentieth century in parallel with the growth of sporting competitions. Now in nearly all OECD countries and many others, there are multiple prize-giving festivals and award ceremonies in which winners are crowned. At the time of writing in 2005 English recorded over 6000 that offered annual awards, and these were increasing at a great rate year by year. One reason for the increase was the fact that countries were competing in staging new awards and offering ever larger prizes to increase their prestige. The most famous awards, such as the Nobel Prize, the Booker, the Prix Goncourt, the Oscars and so on now have competitors in other countries. Some of these are being set up for no other reason but to confer value on certain kinds of marketable commodities. This seems to be the case in Britain with the Turner Prize for painting and installations, etc., which was set up by the advertising firm Saatchi and Saatchi.

What then is the meaning of this sportification of art and what has brought this competitive ethos about, with its contests, prizes and awards? Why was it almost never necessary before, except for rare instances, such as in ancient Athens? Previously questions of quality in the arts were decided by those who

12 James English, *The Economy of Prestige, Prizes, Awards and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 251.

utilized them as an essential part of their lives and the cultures of their societies. The audiences in Elizabethan and Jacobean London decided whose plays were the best after going to watch them; the readers of novels in Victorian London and elsewhere in Britain as well as America decided which were the best novels after reading them. And when they could not make such decisions by themselves, they could consult a huge array of reviewers and critics, for every new novel received extensive critical attention in all the reviewing media, in the daily newspapers, as well as in the magazines, monthlies and other journals that circulated among the literate classes who were the readers of novels. Nobody bothered to review the “penny dreadfuls”, a genre that was emerging as the literature of the barely literate lower classes. At that time, one could speak of a comprehensive literary culture in which novels played an important role, as did the rival genres of drama and poetry. And literature as a whole mattered to society and made a difference to how social affairs were managed.

Now we are living in a completely different cultural environment where literature hardly matters to the affairs of society. Poetry and drama have almost ceased to exist except for small groups of self-enclosed aficionados, like philatelists or other hobbyists. Novels are still read widely, but mostly these are best-sellers read for distraction or entertainment or to fill an idle moment, like all the airport literature which is discarded as soon as the flight is over, as it has fulfilled its purpose. Nevertheless, there is still a small minority of readers who long for something better than best-seller pulp literature. But how, from among the tens of thousands of titles that publishers keep issuing annually, can they find the few that are worth reading because they have something to offer? For serious readers, this is another version of the old problem of finding the needle in the haystack.

Such a reader can no longer rely on honest reviewing and responsible criticism, as he or she could until about half a century ago. Reviewing and cultural journalism is vanishing from most newspapers, which are themselves rapidly disappearing due to the inroads of news on cable-TV and the internet social media. There are only a handful of major newspapers that still carry reviews and cultural criticism, and their readership is continually declining. Magazines and journals have also ceased addressing themselves to contemporary literature as it appears. Academic journals have never done so, and academics themselves are less inclined to do so now since current reviews do not count for much on their CVs and do not enhance their career prospects. Besides, literary academics are also disappearing in the face of the huge growth of special studies courses in which students now enrol, instead of the literature and modern language subjects they used to take in the past. In any case, the study of literary theory, such as Deconstruction, has taken over from criticism and the study

of literature itself. In short, the whole critical function of literary culture is no longer being exercised.

This is where the system of prizes and awards and the sportification of the higher forms of literature steps in – it fills the void left by the erosion of criticism and reviewing. But in doing so, it helps further this erosion too. For serious readers now turn to the outcome of competitive contests to help them decide what to read and what not to read. Hence the annual winners of such prizes are assured a large readership, those who are short listed get smaller readership, and those who the jury does not mention get hardly any readers at all. As usual, in our competitive society, it is a case of winner takes all, or nearly all, as the case may be. The winner of the Booker Prize is almost guaranteed sales in excess of 100,000.

But who decides winners? Usually, it is juries of a half dozen or so “experts”, that is, those who have a career in literature or some other cognate academic activity at best, at worst they are renowned personalities who might include TV presenters of literature shows. Since both aspiring and established authors generally desire to win, since on that hangs their future, it is understandable they will do everything in their power to influence the members of such juries to return verdicts in their favour and against their rivals. These tactics can range from writing works of the kind that are approved by the known or predicted jurors to the illegal resort to blackmail. Little is known of these manoeuvres in literary politics, except for the occasional scandals when the truth of what goes on in these secret conclaves is revealed, and it is usually not a pretty picture.

It is frequently hard to divine why one work should have been declared the winner in such a process of committee bickering and another, perhaps much worthier, should have lost out. To have made an enemy of one powerful member on such a panel is often enough to forfeit one the prize. This has happened to famous and outstanding writers in vying for the Nobel Prize, many of whom have never won it, one need only think of Lawrence, Joyce and other great writers or somewhat lesser ones, such as Graham Green. Something similar takes place at all levels.

Apart from post facto exposures, we can never know what transpires in such confidential deliberations, that is, why one author wins and another loses. This is what makes the system of awards and prizes far inferior to literary culture and reviewing and criticism. Reviewers and critics have to set out clearly and at length the grounds of their judgements and evaluations and even go on to state explicitly or implicitly why and how they agree or disagree with each other or with received opinion. None of this is incumbent on juries or competition judges. Hence, prospective readers who choose winners know little about a work other than that some more or less anonymous judges have ranked it

highly compared to other works. By contrast, the reader who chooses works on the basis of reviews and criticisms has to decide which reviewers' or critics' arguments are sounder and more plausible. Thus, the prospective reader who consults reviews plays a part in the judging process, unlike the reader who goes solely by awards and prizes. This is part of the explanation as to why this latter system for guiding choice of books is far less conducive to educating a literary public and building such a culture in general. Instead, it is far more apt to bring art down to the level of sport, as indeed James English concludes on the basis of his exhaustive study of the awards and prizes system for picking winners:

Art and sport are coming to be thought of as related or analogous practices in which the same interests were at play and the same stakes were at issue. Expositions and festivals of the fine arts became simultaneously more international and more explicitly competitive ... artists from different countries were in effect competing with one another for cash prizes and medals, often delivering speeches from a winner's podium.¹³

Nevertheless, without the operation of such a system of competitive awards, it is doubtful whether any quality literature could survive at present. It serves multiple functions, apart from being a surrogate and replacement for criticism. But in the very process of substituting for criticism, it serves an extremely important marketing function since without it, it is doubtful that sales of quality new books would be anywhere near the figures they still command for the winners of the important awards – and this is one good reason that many publishers keep on bringing out quality literature. As prizes and awards usually receive considerable publicity in the press and electronic media, publishers can count on reasonable profits. The Nobel Prize and a few others as well receive international news coverage. This constitutes the main form of recognition that societies give to great writers.

Lesser writers, especially up and coming ones, also benefit from the recognition afforded by winning awards and prizes. This can lead to invitations to appear on television in interviews, talk shows, and the rare book shows that are still broadcast. No writer is ever invited to appear on these unless they have distinguished themselves by winning awards and prizes. Appearing on such programs is of incalculable benefit in a publicity hungry society and it can literally make a career in literature. It opens up avenues to lecturing, public speaking and appointments in academia as creative-writing lecturers and professors. In

13 James English, *The Economy of Prestige*, op. cit, 250.

the best of cases, it enables a writer to become a celebrity who can rub shoulders with equally renowned sportsmen, businessmen, politicians, and so-called public intellectuals. Since success is all that counts, what does it matter in what field of achievement it was attained and by what means?

Culture has simply become another field of competitive endeavour where success can be attained whether through sheer sales, measured in dollars or crowds, or in the more prestigious way of prizes and awards. This is more or less tantamount to the death of culture as Vargas Llosa terms it. No genuine culture can survive the onslaught of sham culture and its surrogate role in displacing the real thing, especially as 'shame' culture has almost vanished, removing the erstwhile social pressure to feel ashamed of perpetrating any kind of chicanery or obscenity; success is what counts. The winners of the Turner Prize for the best work of art do not feel embarrassed by pocketing the proceeds of a spoof "prize" for the worst work of art. It is as if someone were to win the Nobel and the Ignoble at the same time for the same work. But who cares as long as there is money in it? The net effect of all this on culture is as English outlines it in an introductory comment:

The rise of prizes over the past century, and especially their proliferation over the past decade, is widely seen as one of the more glaring symptoms of a consumer society run rampant, a society that can conceive of artistic achievement only in terms of stardom and success and that is in fact replacing a rich and varied culture with shallow and homogenous McCulture based on the model of network TV.¹⁴

What English calls McCulture we have called sham culture or Ersatz Kultur. In the next section we will look more closely at the role that television, particularly network TV, has played in its creation and then in the final section at the role of the internet.

3 Culture and the Media

Our previous discussion of football and the sportification of culture brought into prominence the crucial concept of surrogates for culture or a sham "culture" that substitutes for real culture, for which the German term is *Ersatz Kultur*. Some sham culture is completely synthetic and does not have any real

¹⁴ Ibid, 2–3.

cultural ingredients, just as mock-turtle soup does not contain any turtles. On the other hand, most sham culture might begin with real cultural ingredients which are synthetically processed, just as processed foods begin with natural food-stock. The degree of processing in food can vary from drying and seasoning for preservation to a total recomposition, and the same variations apply for cultural products.

The presence of processed culture is everywhere apparent in the media, which will constitute the next major topic of our investigation. The degree of processing varies with the type of media and is more prevalent in the electronic media than in print media or other more traditional types. In the electronic media it becomes more intensive as ever newer electronic devices are developed and as these drive changes also in the older ones. We are thus faced with a process of continuous technological revolution which makes ever larger inroads into culture, until finally there is almost nothing of real or traditional culture left and sham culture becomes all pervasive.

To outline this continuous development of the electronic media, we will break up the historical span into three somewhat arbitrary divisions of half a century each, namely, 1900–1950, 1950–2000 and 2000–2020, possibly extending to 2050. The first period marks the start of the electronic media with the so-called Edison inventions of cinema and recorded sound, together with Marconi's radio, and their steady diffusion from around 1900 onwards. The second period is that immediately after the Second World War when television arose as the main platform and became quickly widespread throughout the populations of America, Europe, Japan, Russia, China and the rest of Asia, and finally Africa in roughly that chronological order. It was also the period of great improvements in recording, such as tape-recorders and cassettes with high-fidelity sound and image recording on videos. The third period, starting approximately at the turn of the century, saw the widespread use of personal computers, the internet, cell-phones, and the digitization of all information, including television and radio. Technology has certainly been the driving force behind these developments, but technology alone could not have achieved the diffusion and utilization of inventions and systems of communication that took hold and assumed a mass character. Eventually these technologies became a global system of communication that linked together just about everyone throughout the world. This has had far-reaching cultural consequences and has led to the emergence of a global culture as distinct from all the local cultures. We shall come to that later, but first we must explore the two preceding periods 1900–1950 and 1950–2000.

As we already noted earlier, the beginning of the electronic media is almost coeval with the start of the professionalization of football and sport in general,

and with the sportification of culture as presented by James English. All three processes took place towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Thus, this was the crucial turning point in the move away from traditional culture. It also coincides with the turning to Modernism in the high arts. For just at the time when ordinary folk were beginning to go to the cinema, to dance to recorded music, and a little later to listen to radio, the elite of avant-garde artists were launching their cultural revolutionary experiments.

Behind both these revolutionary cultural developments stood the steady growth of the capitalist economy and the first incipient form of globalization with an international market for goods and services. Things were improving for the working class, even as the bourgeoisie were becoming ever wealthier. This process was interrupted by the First World War and after it by a continuous series of gigantic upheavals both in Europe and America, such as the Great Depression and growing militarization in Europe and America, culminating in the Second World War and the end of this period. Around 1950 a new start began involving continuous economic growth, known as the various economic miracles in Europe. These began to peter out around the mid-1970s, and since then the pace of globalization has steadily increased, with mixed consequences for the various classes, stagnation for those on the bottom and even greater wealth for those on top. This, then, is the economic and political background for the cultural changes we shall be considering.

In the first period 1900–1950 we shall mainly concentrate on the cinema, for this became for most people their main cultural pursuit, particularly so for women and children. Their attendance at the cinema, like football for men, was one of their main weekly preoccupations, though family outings were also common. In many ways this was the great age of cinema. The studios of Hollywood and all the other national film producing centres, such as Ealing in London, Babelsberg in Potsdam and Cinecitta in Rome, were producing all manner of films suitable for every sector of the population, for everybody went to the movies. In quality, these streams of films varied enormously from masterpieces by famous directors for the discerning few to standard B-grade fare for the masses.

Thus, the cinema at that time, during the 20s, 30s and 40s, and to a lesser degree since, assumed a double aspect: on the one hand, it was a new art form in a new medium; but on the other hand, it was the opium of the masses, contrived to provide sentimental dreams or thrills and spills of spectacle or other such intoxicants, which workers in factories and offices craved in order to break the monotony of their daily routines. What Marx unjustly called religion, namely “the opium of the people”, the cinema in fact became. Little wonder Hollywood became known as the dream factory. This double aspect

meant that the cinema was at once art and sham culture; a new art form and means of expression and an anodyne substitute for any real cultural involvement. Throughout the whole history of the cinema the extent to which films satisfied these two functions varied greatly depending on the period and the country. Now it is the case that Hollywood and its equivalents on the other continents, such as Bollywood in India and Nollywood in Nigeria, churn out masses of films that overwhelmingly serve the latter function of distraction and titillation.

During its initial period, largely between the two great wars, the bulk of the subject matter of the cinema came largely from nineteenth century popular and high culture. This material was suitably processed to make it fit the technical capacities of the camera and simplified and shortened for the limited attention spans of mass audiences. There was hardly a nineteenth century art form or literary mode that was not adapted for the cinema, from music hall and vaudeville at one extreme to the great novels at the other. Charlie Chaplin films exemplify the former category, for he had started as a variety artist, and “Gone with the Wind” indirectly exemplifies the latter, for that is a movie rendering of a novel that was itself a Civil War version of *War and Peace*. Hardly anything that fully belonged to the twentieth century ever appeared on film unless it had something to do with war. Of course, propaganda films by the Soviet and Nazi regimes did reflect contemporary issues, but only in a highly distorted way, and even that very rarely. Realism in the cinema only came in with the Italian directors de Sica and Rossellini after the Second World War or in rare British productions such as “The Third Man” based on a script by Graham Green. This is, of course, not a requirement for great films, which could be based on other resources, such as Jean Renoir’s “Les Règles du Jeu”, whose wit and plotting owes something to Beaumarchais’ “Marriage of Figaro” but is, nevertheless, an original work, which reflected its time, the period just before the war. One of the greatest Hollywood productions, Orson Wells “Citizen Kane”, also an original work, casts a strong critical light on much of American media and politics.

The story we have told of cinema might also be told of the other electronic media during this period. Radio varied in quality from BBC programs in Britain under the tutelage of Reith at one end to the commercialized stock fare of standard networks in America at the other. Recorded music enabled a wide audience to hear great music for the first time ever; and also made it possible for popular music, such as that of the great chansonniers in France or jazz in America, to reach a mass public. But at the same time, Tin Pan Alley was already dominating by churning out schmalzy sentimental fare.

Starting in America, but rapidly spreading, the stranglehold of advertising was already asserting itself over all culture, and this would increase ever after

to a greater extent. Advertisements themselves are a prime example of sham culture. They are usually brand names and blazons or quasi-heralding signs. At best they are little miniatures composed of puns or other verbal play, stock imagery, musical jingles, filmed clichés, actions and settings. One need only compare them to folk art and folk sayings to see how inferior they are as art. Yet to concoct them, teams of so-called creative people are employed and paid high salaries. A whole industry has been developed on this basis simply to sell goods and broadcast other commercial propaganda. Political propaganda is, of course, no better in this respect; it, too, is a variety of sham culture.

The dominance of advertising over all the media and eventually over art itself became ever so much greater in the second period 1950–2000. It was then that television arrived to displace the cinema in the lives of the masses, and rock music substituted for most of the other popular musical styles. With the advent of television, hucksters did not have to wait for customers to come and buy or meet them where they could be ambushed with ads; now they could invite themselves into their very homes at any time of day or night, as long as the television set was turned on. And almost everything that was on television, soon to be known as the idiot-box, revolved around advertising, at least in America. In Britain the BBC initially put up a rear-guard fight against the total commercialization of the TV screen, and something similar took place in the other West European countries. But it was a losing battle, as the commercial interests of the capitalist economy proved too strong and eventually prevailed upon governments. Commercial stations were registered and government ones were allowed to broadcast advertising.

As a result of such developments, rampant commercialization and consumerism ensued. Passive consumption of sham culture took the place of active participation in cultural activities, as Roger McNamee puts it:

Beginning with television, technology has changed the way we engage with society, substituting passive consumption of content and ideas for civic engagement, digital communication for conversation.¹⁵

A passive non-participatory consumer attitude to all culture, whether real or sham, took over from actually doing anything, even if this only means attentive and engaged listening or viewing. A mentally lazy, disengaged attention requiring least effort came to prevail even while experiencing the great works of the

15 Roger McNamee, *Zucked: Waking Up to the Facebook Catastrophe* (New York: Harper Collins, 2020), 10.

past. Thus, the recorded music of the great composers began to be used for the anaesthetizing effect of putting one to sleep. The sham music of muzak takes this a stage even further for this is not even meant to be heard, yet still exerts its effect as part of the background sound.

Such conditioned habits of attention developed from the way television came to be used as an anodyne to relieve the stresses of working life and provide distraction for people. Whole families relaxed before the box in silence and individual isolation, each in a viewing bubble detached from the others. This kind of viewing can become highly addictive and symptoms of withdrawal can be experienced when for some extraneous reason it is no longer available. This is particularly the case with children, for whom special programs and advertisements were carefully crafted to keep them glued to the screen, so to speak. Children can become addicted if they are brought up from infancy on this sham culture, and are not easily weaned off it and can no longer be brought to care for anything more engaging. This is how young people become averse to real culture; which partly explains the rise of the counter-culture of drugs, sex and rock-and-roll soon after the television age was inaugurated.

The corruption of children's culture is one of the most pernicious effects of television and the new media in general. It constitutes a new kind of massacre of the innocents in that innocence is killed off very early in life. Even in play, children are not left to their own devices to follow their own imaginings. Instead, commercialized games and sets for playing games have invaded childhood activities. Little girls, who used to play with rag dolls and had to resort to imagination to make them life-like, are now provided with prefabricated paraphernalia. The older ones are supplied with Barbie doll sets that channel their fantasies into predictable commercial desires for fancy clothes and other gear. The little boys are similarly supplied with realistic looking guns and given videos that teach them how to use them to shoot people. The vast array of traditional children's games, sayings, verses, riddles and all else that was passed on by children themselves from generation to generation have almost all disappeared, as the work of the Opies has demonstrated.¹⁶

It all became much worse in the internet age, our third period from around 2000 onwards. Those brought up on computers almost from birth in this period are known as internet natives and considered to be computer literate. Among many of them, gaming on consoles and special internet platforms has become an all-consuming activity, and some neither rest nor sleep in order to

16 See Jona Opie and Peter Opie, *The Lore and Language of Children* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959) and *Children's Games in Street and Playground* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

continue playing, so addictive has it become. In fact, programs deliberately designed to induce addiction are a feature of social media such as Facebook, as has now been revealed by some of the designers themselves. And on top of all this, there is the growing proliferation of shooter-games and so-called eSport, consisting of shooting at humanoid looking targets, which could have desensitizing effects on boys and young men who habitually indulge in them. Even young children's preference for looking at videos on YouTube is perhaps not quite as harmless as it is made out to be, especially if they are allowed to watch it unsupervised for hours on end.¹⁷

These are merely the outward symptoms of what has occurred in the twenty-first century, showing that we have entered into a much more pervasive era of sham culture brought about by the fusion of culture and economy, as Allen Scott explains:

As we now enter the twenty-first century, I suggest that perhaps the most effective short-hand that characterizes this new state of play is the designation *cognitive-cultural economy*, meaning the economic order that is internally formed on mobilizing the knowledge, creativity, cultural attributes, sensibility and behavioural characteristic of the labour force, in combination with the technological infrastructure based on digital computation. As such, the cognitive-cultural economy coincides with sectors like science-intensive manufacturing, business and financial services, fashion-oriented production, neo-artisanal industries, audio-visual media, publicity, and so on.¹⁸

In other words, there is now a total integration of sham culture into the economic system of media production, based on digital computer programs, together with the consumerist market of entertainment. Sham culture is just another product of this system of economy and technology. As Scott puts it:

One of the defining features of contemporary capitalism, then, is the conspicuous convergence that is occurring between the domain of the economic, on the one hand, and the domain of the cultural on the other. Vast segments of the output of the modern economy are inscribed with significant cultural content (in the sense given above), while culture is

17 See James Bridle, *New Dark Age*, op. cit, 230.

18 Allen J. Scott, "Cultural Economy: Retrospect at Prospect", in Helmut Anheier and Yudhishthira Ray Isar, eds. *The Cultural Economy: Culture and Civilization Series* (2) (London: Sage, 2008), 307.

increasingly being supplied in the commodity form, i.e., as goods and services produced by private firms in conformity with price signals and profitability criteria.¹⁹

Thus, there are now firms with a global reach that cater to all aspects of sham cultural production, from product conception to marketing, advertising and distribution in numerous forms. The idea of synergy is invoked to rationalize production so that the one product, idea or theme can be utilized in various ways across numerous media, as in print, film, television, video and many more. This can only be done by the largest all-inclusive media firms that bear the familiar names of Time Warner, Sony, Disney, Daewoo, Bertelsmann, News Corp, and a few more. Mostly they are American by origin, but some from other countries have also entered the global market for cultural commodities.

Hosting such companies turns America and various other countries, at present mainly European, into post-industrial societies. They specialize in the production of sham culture together with fashions, adornment, fast foods, alcoholic beverages and everything else that caters to the luxury living that more and more rich people across the globe can now afford. These so-called culture industries now employ a sizeable proportion of the labour force of the advanced economies. According to Scott:

... in the United States just over three million (2.4 percent of the total labour force) were employed in the culture-products sector, representing both manufacturing and service activities. In Britain, according to Pratt (1997), a little under one million workers (4.7 percent of the total labour force) are employed in cultural industries and their main input providers.²⁰

These figures, which held for 2008, are most likely much higher now. The competition for global cultural production is increasing all the time as other countries enter to challenge the leaders. Now it is China and India that are making a bid for global market share with their cultural products. These compete but do not displace each other, and so the one overarching global culture of commodities is emerging, as Scott concludes:

19 Ibid, 308.

20 Ibid, 310.

Notwithstanding the many cultural clashes that continue to break out as globalization runs its course, we seem to be steadily moving in a world that is becoming more and more cosmopolitan and eclectic in its modes of cultural consumption. Certainly, for the consumers in the more advanced parts of the world, the standard American staples are now but one element of an ever-widening palette of cultural offerings comprising Latin-American *telenovelas*, Japanese comic books, Hong Kong kung fu movies, West African music, Korean pop culture, London fashions, Balinese tourist resorts, Australian and Chilean wines, Mexican cuisine, and untold exotic fare ...²¹

Who could fail to be enthralled by all this variety, ready and waiting for the consumer to choose from at any moment of the day or night? One can choose as one pleases what to eat, to wear, to listen to, to read, to watch on screen, with whom to interact, what to communicate to so-called “friends” or all and sundry. In short, this becomes a life where one is free to sample and taste everything without being committed to anything or anyone. One can feel perfectly free to arrange one’s life just as one fancies. But what kind of life is this, and what kind of person does one end up becoming? This is not a question that the many who aspire to that life ever ask themselves.

4 Culture and the Internet

With the ascendancy of virtual crowds on the internet and the pervasiveness of information technologies as the media for both private and public life, the very terms on which such life is based are becoming corrupted. Crucial distinctions between the fundamental oppositions of social discourse are becoming blurred: the real and the fake, truth and falsity, fact and fiction, the actual and the virtual, and many more such basic differentiations in terms of which people can orient themselves in both intellectual and practical life. It has always been the arduous and painstaking task of teachers throughout the ages to instil such norms into the minds of children. Now, no doubt they still labour to achieve such results in schools and higher institutions of learning; but with ever lesser chance of succeeding, for their work is being ever more undermined, if not openly boycotted, by what takes place on social media and elsewhere in society.

21 Ibid, 317.

Even though the work of the schools has been technically highly successful in making basic literacy an almost universal accomplishment, it has been a failure in being unable to counter the ever-growing predisposition to cultural illiteracy. Where people cannot tell the difference between the fundamental opposites of discourse, or where they have come to believe that they no longer matter or when they deliberately invert them, then they become illiterate in a far more profound sense than being merely unable to read and write. Old accusations thrown about, such as philistines or cultural barbarians, do not do justice to such people who think that there are alternative facts, or that facts are made up fictions, or that there are no facts only interpretations, as Nietzsche once expressed it in a careless comment which literary scholars now unthinkingly parrot. No book reader, bookkeeper or bookmaker or anyone with the least literacy would ever have said things like that, yet there are many who repeat them now for all kinds of ulterior reasons and malicious motives. At a time when sham culture trumps shame culture it is possible for presidents as well as professors to voice such views. For when sociologists of science state that one cannot distinguish between science and myth, how can one fault a president who believes that facts are of his own choosing.

There is no shame for those who communicate anonymously whatever vile-ness they want to express on the net. The world wide web, which its idealistic inventors thought would be a boon for untrammelled and uncensored self-expression, has become a vast sewer of filth, lies and deceptions, a rumour mill where unsubstantiated gossip circulates. At best it is an echo chamber where one's own views come back reinforced by apparent confirmation from many others. When nobody takes responsibility for saying anything whatever, and nobody is held to account for falsehood, calumny, deception, misrepresentation, or anything else that is liable to litigation and censure in real social life, then the whole of morality, honesty and truthfulness goes by the board.

What chance do schools and teachers have to bring up their charges to understand and abide by the basic norms of discourse when the hucksters of sham culture, the media manipulators and now the dispensers of false social relations have proved themselves to be so much more enticing to gullible young minds? All this began with the propaganda for computer literacy which was swallowed by almost everybody in our advanced societies, including the politicians who are otherwise so sceptical of everyone's motives. Hardly a voice was raised against it. There were, of course, huge commercial interests at stake, as well as the usual ideological illusions that advanced technology of itself brings progress. We are all now learning to our cost that computer literacy was bought at the price of general illiteracy. The mass introduction of computers in schools and the training of children from infancy in their use has not advanced

academic scores in any teaching subjects, if anything it has depressed results in a number of them, including mathematics which is so essential for scientific education. It goes without saying that these strictures against the reliance on computers for teaching in schools do not apply to their use in business or bureaucracy or other spheres where they have proved of great usefulness. This is also the case in many types of scientific research. The fault lies not in computers as machines; it is the technology boosters who raised such false hopes about their use for educational purposes who are to blame.

But before we consider what actually eventuated from the computer revolution, let us briefly look at what was expected from it at the time. Writing in 1998, already well into the computer age, the highly reputable historian of cities and civilization, Peter Hall, concludes his magnum opus on the city in history with a highly sanguine account of what is to be expected in the future as a result of the new technologies. He begins very sensibly, saying that though technology is important, "what is really crucial, as before in history, is not the basic infrastructure, but what the infrastructure enables. It is the application that will prove crucial ..." ²² Then he goes on to argue that the most important applications will be in education:

Education is perhaps the most obvious of these applications. As William Mitchell puts it: 'If a latter-day Jefferson were to lay out an ideal educational community for the third millennium, he might put in cyberspace'. Douglas Hague suggests that education will be totally transformed: information technology will not destroy the teaching profession, as some fear, but will change it beyond recognition, by allowing teachers to produce high-quality lessons to suit the needs of individual students. ²³

But not only will information technology prove greatly beneficial for primary and secondary teachers and students, but also teaching in the universities and other tertiary schools will also be transformed. As Hall goes on to predict:

First-rate remote lectures will replace second- or third-rate direct ones; multimedia presentation will allow students to pace their own learning. Teachers will thus find themselves performing new roles: as 'guides' or tutors; as 'communication/interpreters' on TV; as scholar/interpreters, turning research into teaching materials, and as 'assemblers', packaging

²² Peter Hall, *Cities in Civilization* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998), 950.

²³ *Ibid*, 951.

this material into products; all working in teams, on the model set in the 1960s by the UK Open University.²⁴

“Oh, brave new world that hath such people in it!” The result has fallen far short of the promise. For the moment we will postpone considering what has actually transpired in the universities, as another volume will be devoted to this account. Here we will concentrate solely on schools.

In an economically and technologically advanced country such as Australia – where the information technology revolution occurred early, soon after America, and where it was spurred on by substantial government funding – the overall results in all subjects on the PISA tests have been steadily falling. It is difficult to prove conclusively that this is solely due to the introduction of computers into classrooms, since there are so many other factors to be considered, due to the ever-increasing prevalence of sham culture in society. Nevertheless, at least part of the blame must be ascribed to computers, as is evident from the fact that some of the very best performing schools in the country, very high-cost private tuition schools (modelled on Britain’s so-called “public” schools), have banned the use of computers in classrooms.

But quite apart from such obvious markers of fallings standards, which might or might not matter as far as real education is concerned, there are other indicators that are perhaps even more troubling. Creativity and imagination matter more than test scores and high grades, for there are many countries, especially in Asia, where students attain high grades but tend to lack these essential qualities. In so far as one can test for these hard to specify and almost indefinable factors, the available tests show that scores are steadily falling, as Peter Murphy reports in 2010:

Twenty years into the post-modern era, creativity scores were generally falling-off and some of the subsidiary components of creativity tested for by the Torrance test had begun to decline as early as 1984. The fall-off was worst among the young, those aged from kindergarten years to third grade. What does this mean? It indicates that the observed decline in creation and innovation in the universities and the innovation economy extends deep into the pores of the wider society.²⁵

24 Ibid, 951.

25 Peter Murphy, *Universities and Innovation Economies*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 57.

Murphy is writing from the standpoint of 2010, and since then there has been no improvement, only a continuing steady decline. Murphy quotes from a paper by K.H. Kim who “found that the drop in creative thinking was steady and persistent from 1990 to 2008 and ranged across various components tested by the TTCT.”²⁶ But at the same time, as Murphy also notes, the so-called Flynn-effect continued to operate and scores on IQ tests kept on rising, which strongly indicates that “cleverness” and “creativity” do not correlate. Murphy arrives on this basis at the following conclusion:

What this hints at, is that a typical post-modern ‘clever’ country or ‘smart’ society (like the United States or Australia) might manage in certain ways to be more intelligent, yet at the same time end up alarmingly less creative. This is a paradox worth reflecting on. It suggests, among other things, that the post-modern identification of education and creation is misleading. More education does not make societies more creative. In fact, over the decades that the OECD countries have aggressively expanded higher education social creativity has declined.²⁷

The effects of exposing children to computers and the internet, as even computer professionals now admit, have been largely bad. One such is Roger McNamee, a former partner of Mark Zuckerberg, who puts it quite unequivocally:

Kids are far more vulnerable to screen-based technology than I ever imagined. For a generation we assumed that exposing kids to technology was an unalloyed positive. This was incorrect, with a high cost.²⁸

What the cost has been, is evident not only from over-all school results, but from individual psychological problems caused directly by harmful or uncaring programming practices, such as the following:

In the mindless pursuit of growth, internet platforms had built a range of products for kids. It is hard to know whether the platforms were ignorant of children’s vulnerability or drawn to it, but the kid’s products they created appeared to cause developmental and psychological problems.²⁹

26 Kim, T.H., “The Creativity Crisis: The Decrease in Creative Thinking Scores on the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking”, *Creativity Research Journal*, 3–4, (2008), 285–295.

27 Ibid, 67.

28 Roger McNamee, *Zucked*, op. cit, 237.

29 Ibid, 156.

He notes that “doctors have observed that kids with too much screen time suffer from a variety of developmental issues, including an inability to pay attention and depression.”³⁰ Yet despite such medical warnings, “many schools insist on using PCs or tablets in the classroom, despite evidence that computers and tablets may be counterproductive in that setting, both because of the negative effects of dopamine stimulation and a reduction in social interactions.”³¹

But even apart from such problems of attention and interaction, addiction to computer screens and surfing the net cause deep seated failures of reading, comprehension and thought, such as Nicholas Carr exposes.³² Children and adults who read text on the computer screen do so much more shallowly than those who read ordinary paper texts, especially so if there are hypertexts attached. Reading experiments have shown that “comprehension declined as the number of links increased.”³³ What is perhaps even more troubling is that even experienced readers resort to much more superficial reading strategies when reading online; they browse and jump from text to text rather than reading in the traditional sequential way line by line and paragraph after paragraph. As a result, their comprehension is diminished. What Carr calls “deep reading” or thoughtful reading with understanding is disappearing, and with it the whole culture of the book as this is traditionally conceived. The very effort that Google has made, in order to make all books available is destroying what these books seek to convey. As Carr sees it:

The irony in Google’s effort to bring greater efficiency to reading is that it undermines the very different kind of efficiency that the technology of the book brought to reading – and to our minds – in the first place ... With writing on the screen, we’re still able to decode text quite quickly – we read, if anything, faster than ever – but we’re no longer guided toward a deep personally constructed understanding of the text’s connotations. Instead, we’re hurried off toward another bit of related information, and then another and another. The strip mining of “relevant content” replaces the slow excavation of meaning.³⁴

30 Ibid, 273.

31 Ibid, 273.

32 Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: How the internet is changing the way we think, read and remember* (London: Atlantic Books, 2010).

33 Ibid, 128.

34 Ibid, 166.

The lives of children and young people in general in advanced societies provide some indication of what the lives of most people on the globe will be like in the future. More and more of their lives will be controlled by the internet and the media, more and more of their access to reality will be mediated by this technological apparatus that processes so much of what people see, hear and know. Just as stomachs now consume more and more processed foods, and little that is *au naturel*, so brains are becoming more and more dependent on mediated information and little that comes directly from people. In despotic countries this information is censored and controlled in every respect; in liberal democratic countries it is merely surreptitiously watched by the big media firms. These provide the internet services and devise the algorithms on which they are based, codes biased as far as possible to suit their business interests. Escape from this system of mediation is now almost impossible, for everything most people do in work or leisure, in study or play, in society or solitude is now governed by it. As Dr Johnson once said, he who tires of London tires of life; so, one might now say, he who removes himself from the net removes himself from life – that is, of life as it is lived on the net. Is another kind of life still left?

Since so much of reality comes to us through the mediation of a technology which can so easily be perverted, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between what is real and what is illusory. On the net, reality and virtual reality begin to seamlessly fuse into each other. Is what one sees on the screen the reflection of a real scene or a made-up visual image? How can one any longer know? Is what one hears in a report valid news or fake news? There are even worse confusions created by human relations on the so-called social media that put into question our moral criteria. Is presenting a false persona on the net deception or just a game of make believe? Is one communicating with a person at all or with a bot, a cleverly contrived program?

The breakdown of the fundamental binaries of discourse, such as those of truth and lies, reality and illusion, genuine and fake, points to the breakdown of the distinction between real culture and sham culture which we have sought to uphold in our account. When the whole of the internet information system has become one media generating technological apparatus, then genuine culture and what is fake culture can no longer be separated. All becomes information indifferently, more or less processed to suit the requirements and interests of those who produce it.

There are innumerable examples of how this is taking place; we shall select a few for illustrative purposes. Until now it could be assumed that films were made by directors, script writers and actors and intended to appeal to a certain kind of audience with certain specific interests. But now it is no longer clear who or what is making films or who or what features in them or for whom they

are intended. Computer programs are assuming an ever-larger role in the process, as James Bridle reports:

In Hollywood, studios run their scripts through neural networks of a company called Epagogix, a system trained on the unstated preferences of millions of moviegoers developed over decades in order to predict which lines will push the right – meaning the most lucrative – emotional buttons. Their algorithmic engines are enhanced with data from Netflix, Hulu, YouTube and others, whose access to minute-by-minute preferences of millions of video watchers, combined with an obsessive focus on the acquisition and regimentation of data, provides them with a level of cognitive insight undreamt of by previous regimes.³⁵

In reference to this kind of film production one can no longer ask whether this is real or sham culture, as one still could of the old Hollywood films; instead, one begins to wonder whether this is culture at all in any sense. Culture, whether real or sham, true or fake, is always taken to be a human product intended for readily understood cultural ends, even though very often base and lowly ones. But the kinds of films now being produced are as much machine generated as human products, and they are intended to elicit immediate quasi-psychological responses: “Feeding directly upon the frazzled, binge-watching desires of over-saturated consumers, [thus] the network turns upon itself, reflecting, reinforcing and heightening the paranoia inherent in the system”, as Bridle explains.³⁶ As he goes on to show, game developers work in the same way with “real-time monitoring of players’ behaviour until they have such a fine grasp on dopamine-producing neural pathways that teenagers die of exhaustion in front of the computers, unable to tear themselves away.”³⁷ Gaming is an addictive and dangerous sport.

Bridle concludes from many such examples that “entire cultural industries become feedback loops for an increasingly dominant narrative of fear and violence.”³⁸ But can one any longer call these even cultural industries, since there is so little that is cultural about them. Might this not be just as much considered mass unsupervised scientific experimentation carried out by computer engineers. Stalin once called poets “the emotional engineers of the soul”, but only now has this become a literal truth. However, it is no longer poets but

35 James Bridle, *New Dark Age*, op. cit, 130.

36 Ibid, 130.

37 Ibid, 130.

38 Ibid, 130.

commercial predators who are engaged in these “engineering” activities, which are at once art, business, science, technology and whatever else that goes into it. Whatever it is, it is no longer culture in any meaningful sense at all.

To a larger or lesser extent this kind of processing occurs throughout all the information provided on the net, to varying degrees it is all computer-generated artifacts. Thus, Shoshana Zuboff states that “Google successfully imposed computer mediation on broad domains of human behaviour as people searched online and engaged with the web through a growing roster of Google services.”³⁹ Both Google and the other big media firms process the data they handle, that is, manipulate it to some extent to serve their own interests. Zuboff is quite unequivocal about that fact:

There have been myriad revelations of Google and Facebook’s manipulation of the information we see. For now, I will simply point out that Google’s algorithms derived from surplus [a computing term] select and order search results, Facebook’s algorithms derived from surplus, select and order the content of its News Feed. In both cases, researchers have shown that the manipulators reflect each corporation’s commercial objectives.⁴⁰

As more and more of the world’s information became digitized, so ever more of it became open to manipulations of all kinds. As Zuboff shows: “By 2013, the progress of digitation and datafication (the application of software that allows computer and algorithms to process and analyse raw data) combined with new and cheaper storage technologies had translated 98 percent of the world’s information into digital format”.⁴¹ Thus, for example, nearly all the world’s literature and art now exists in data form. Hence, it is now possible for Facebook, Amazon and Google “to create value out of the vast amounts of data through intelligent computational analyses.”⁴² This is known as data mining in the trade and it promises to offer greater wealth than the real kind.

We have now entered the stage of what is called ambient computing where data is streaming in from “the always-on instrumentation, datafication, connection, communication and computation of all things, animated and inanimate, and all processes – natural-human, physical, chemical, machine,

39 Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (London: Profile Books, 2019), 67.

40 Ibid, 186.

41 Ibid, 187.

42 Ibid, 138.

administrative, vehicular, financial.”⁴³ Everything that is surveyed or connected to anything else can generate information back to central storage facilities “where it finds new life as data ready for transformation into productions, all of it filling the ever-expanding pages of the shadow text.”⁴⁴ It is ready for use to serve “a twenty-first century means of behavioural modification.”⁴⁵ But, as Zuboff points out, the aim of this is not old-style Orwellian twentieth century “brainwashing” but something much more up-to-date and subtle than the old, crude technique:

The aim of this undertaking is not to impose behavioural norms, such as conformity or obedience, but rather to produce behaviour that reliably, definitely and certainly leads to desired commercial results.⁴⁶

However, in despotic countries, such as China, it goes way beyond desired commercial results and embraces desired political results as well.

This translation of nearly everything into data is making possible the production of new realms of data recreation where virtual realities can be made to appear more real than reality itself. Thus, for example, it is now possible to resurrect the dead and to make them appear as living beings with whom one can interact. Hollywood has long perfected the art of making dead actors appear post-mortem in films, but with computers and clever algorithms this has now gone a stage further so that even ordinary people can have their dead relatives, especially their dead children, revived and appear to them as virtual reality avatars, whom they can meet again and even touch. As Harry de Quetteville reports in an article on so-called deep fake technology:

So-called “deep fake” software, which allows sophisticated video recreations of anyone, is available to download online, while we all commit more and more personal information to the internet – images, stories, thoughts, feelings – from which AI “corpuses” to recreate our own personalities can be derived.⁴⁷

43 Ibid, 202.

44 Ibid, 202.

45 Ibid, 203.

46 Ibid, 203.

47 Harry de Quetteville, *The Telegraph* (London), reprinted in *The Age* (Melbourne), 2 January 2020.

There is now a commercial service available that offers people the chance to “live on forever as an avatar”. Another research project Augmented Eternity “wants to compile a library of avatars” for use in life, which we might be able to borrow and swap as needed. All this raises the usual problems with deep fakes: one must ask how far they are based on any kind of reality and how far they are due to the machinations of the AI codes used to make them.

At this stage we begin to enter Jean Baudrillard’s world of hyperreality, that which is more real than the real. Baudrillard penned his theories way before any of this was technically possible, but by now technology is catching up with his weirdest speculations. His basic views are summed up by his American follower Douglas Kellner, who puts it as follows:

In this postmodern world, individuals flee from the “desert of the real” for the ecstasies of hyperreality and the new realm of computers, media, and technological experience. In this universe subjectivities are fragmented and lost, and a new terrain of experience appears, which for Baudrillard renders previous social theories and politics obsolete and irrelevant.⁴⁸

This is happening because “people are caught up in the play of images, spectacles and simulacra, which have less and less relationship to an external ‘reality’, to such an extent that the very concepts of the social, political or even ‘reality’ no longer have any meaning.”⁴⁹ What we have put in terms of the concept of “culture”, Baudrillard puts in terms of the concept of “meaning”, arguing that “the masses seek spectacle and not meaning” because “the narcotized and mesmerized (some of Baudrillard’s metaphors) media-saturated consciousness is in such a state of fascination with images and spectacle that the concept of meaning (which depends on stable boundaries, fixed structures, shared consensus) dissolves ...”⁵⁰ And as meaning dissolves, so, too, does culture.

None of this means that ordinary realities are disappearing, as Baudrillard supposed when he asserted that the Iraq war never took place but was a media hallucination. Unfortunately, the reality of blood and gore was all too true and experienced by those involved. No matter how long people spend online, sooner or later they must return to the mundane realities of their material lives. The technology has not yet been invented, such as Marvin Minsky and other AI gurus imagine, that would permit us to exist solely as information on a

48 Douglas Kellner, “Jean Baudrillard”, in George Ritzer, ed, *The Blackwell Companion to Major Contemporary Social Theorists*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 321.

49 Ibid, 322.

50 Ibid, 322.

disc or some other computing apparatus. And it never will, for there are strong arguments against any such possibility, anyway.⁵¹ We are more than, and other than, mere information, we are real bodies anchored in reality.

However, many such Baudrillardian insights are applicable to culture, which is rapidly becoming unreal, a mere dream from the historic past. Culture in all its aspects is disappearing in a world of a superabundance of information and very little knowledge; and where the vast stores of information we have amassed are destroying that very knowledge itself. This is the conclusion that Bridle comes to:

And so, we feel ourselves today connected to vast repositories of knowledge, and yet we have not learned to think. In fact, the opposite is true: that which was intended to enlighten the world in practice darkens it. The abundance of information and the plurality of world views now accessible to us through the internet are not producing a coherent consensus of reality, but one riven by fundamentalist insistence on simple narratives, conspiracy theories, and postfactual politics. It is on this contradiction that the idea of a new dark age turns, an age in which the value we have placed upon knowledge is destroyed by the abundance of that profitable commodity, and in which we look about ourselves in search of new ways to understand the world.⁵²

All this is symptomatic of the fact that we are entering the twilight of a cultural dark age. How and when we might ever come out of it is not for us to know. But if we do not come out of it eventually then humanity as we have known it is doomed. A post-human condition is even now being talked about; what that is nobody can possibly imagine. But we know enough to sense intuitively that it is not one that bodes any good for us as human beings.

We opened this chapter with a quotation from Llosa and we conclude it with another:

The great majority of humanity does not engage with, produce or appreciate any form of culture other than what used to be considered by cultured people, disparagingly, as mere popular pastimes, with no links to the intellectual, artistic and literary activities that were once at the heart

⁵¹ See Harry Redner, *Quintessence of Dust: The Science of Matter and the Philosophy of Mind* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), Chapter 7.

⁵² James Bridle, *New Dark Age*, op. cit, 10.

of culture. This former culture is now dead, although it still survives in small social enclaves, without any influence on the mainstream.⁵³

The truth of Llosa's judgement should now be amply evident from all that has been established in this chapter, indeed, from the book as a whole.

53 Mario Vargas Llosa, *Notes on the Death of Culture*, op. cit, 20.

Afterword – in the Twilight of a Cultural Dark Age

After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness?

T.S. Eliot



We do not know precisely what knowledge Eliot had in mind, for being a poet he does not have to spell it out. But with a certain degree of poetic license, we might surmise that it is somewhat close to the knowledge we have tried to convey in this book. Hence, now at its conclusion, we must pose the same anguished question: after such knowledge what forgiveness?

What forgiveness can there be for trying to foist on ordinary, innocent people the guilty knowledge that they are living in the twilight of a cultural dark age? Should such knowledge not be forbidden or at least hidden? For does it not poison the wellspring of life by making the future seem bleak and hopeless? Are not the lives of people, especially the young, fraught with enough difficulty already without this extra burden of unwelcome historical knowledge? And can we even be sure that this is indeed knowledge and not some delusion that history has conjured up through the devilish cunning of reason? For where history is concerned, reason can deceive:

History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guides us by vanities.¹

Certainly, if history is to be our guide, as perforce it must, for we have no other way to look back or look ahead, then we must beware of its delusions, its vagaries and false analogies. So let us keep two points in mind. Firstly, in talking of a cultural dark age we do not mean the historical Dark Ages as these occurred in Europe with the fall of the Roman Empire. Secondly, we have only entered the twilight and not the deep night of cultural darkness. The sun of science and technology is still ascendent and at its zenith, so if there is darkness, it is that paradoxical darkness at noon when there is glaring light but no enlightenment.

1 T.S. Eliot, "Gerontion", in *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (London: Faber and Faber), 1963, 39–41.

Should that concern ordinary innocent people, as for many of them life seems never to have been better? For when before in the history of mankind have more people lived longer or more comfortably than now? If the greatest happiness for the largest number is the utilitarian measure of value, then do they not live in the best of times? Have they not progressed way beyond any of their ancestors?

In general, save for the very poor and the politically oppressed, life offers affluence and freedom such as few could even aspire to before. Many people can move around from city to city all over the globe, and those with means can even settle where they choose. And culturally, too, it seems that people are better off than ever before. Literacy is almost universal, schooling for many people is free, and for some there is also free university education. Books are available free of charge or at a small cost. All kinds of cultural goods are also freely available. Many people are now liberated from the tyrannies of the past, including those of class, race and gender. It almost seems as if the first three horsemen of the apocalypse have been driven off. Only the last, death, remains still to be dealt with, and the rate of progress in the medical sciences arouses hope that it might not be too long before death, too, will lose its dominion, as St Paul promised long ago.

Scientists, economists and even artists have not been shy or backward in singing the paeans of progress. One such is the economist Deirdre McCloskey who is representative of many with such views, so we will take her pronouncement as reflecting those of all others:

All the economists who have looked into the evidence agree that the average real income per person in the world is rising faster than ever before. The results will be a gigantic increase in the number of scientists, designers, writers, musicians, engineers, entrepreneurs, and ordinary business people devising betterments that will spill over the now rich countries allegedly lacking in dynamism.²

This will not be a mere matter of affluence and material prosperity, but of spiritual enrichment as well: “We shall expect during the next hundred years a world spiritual change, enabled by much higher incomes.”³ In fact, “the resulting spiritual change will be as impressive as the material changes.”⁴ And the best of this cultural cornucopia of plenty will come from Africa, for “genetic

² Deirdre McCloskey, *Bourgeois Equality*, op. cit, 64.

³ *Ibid*, 72.

⁴ *Ibid*, 70.

diversity in a rich Africa will yield a crop of geniuses unprecedented in world history.”⁵

McCloskey seems to be applying a simple economic formula: money plus genes equals genius. It is strange, therefore, that we do not see a crop of geniuses emerging from China, given its phenomenal economic development and the huge rise in the prosperity of its people. Surely, Chinese genes cannot be all that inferior to African ones? What we have seen instead of geniuses have been competent scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs, designers and musical performers, but as yet not even Nobel Prize winners. This cannot be due to the inferiority of Chinese genes, since Chinese scientists living in America have won Nobel Prizes. In China itself scientists have produced almost as many papers as in America, but very few of these are of high quality. Its engineers have secured more patents than in America, but so far have not created new industries, only made small incremental adjustments to the old ones. No doubt, in time mainland Chinese will win Nobel Prizes, but these will not be awarded to geniuses making fundamental discoveries, for these (as we have seen), are more or less precluded in future science. Most probably they will be earned, as is mostly the case now, for small but significant improvements.

As far as the arts are concerned, the problems for creative Chinese are even more difficult than in science. Thus far, China has produced a few really competent modern writers but no composers of any distinction. The arts are even less subject to the law that money plus genes produces genius than the sciences. Genius or extraordinary creativity in the arts is not a function of numbers or even of prizes and awards of any kind, including the Nobel Prize. It is well possible, and indeed likely, that in the future, as has already happened in the past, writers in China and Africa will win more Nobel Prizes for literature and that composers will also emerge to win awards. But will that mean that a new literature and a new music will emerge from China or Africa? That seems most unlikely, since for that to happen there would have to be a new culture or, in effect, a new civilization coming from these sources. But there is no reason to believe that this will happen there, or anywhere else for that matter. As we have maintained, we are now living at a time of rapidly diminishing civilization and this is affecting all nations and all continents.

The Panglosses of our times, such as McCloskey and very many others, believe that we are living in the best of all possible worlds for the present. But they also believe that things are bound to become even better in the future. They see all impediments to progress being overcome and new possibilities

5 Ibid, 71.

continually opening up, almost without limit. For just as we live in an expanding universe, so, too, we live in an expanding economy where the GNP keeps on going up and up. Life for more and more people will therefore continue to get better and better.

But at least two considerations should give them pause. The first is the very real possibility that another Lisbon earthquake of far larger scope could happen at any time, and not just flatten one city but all the major cities in the world and make them uninhabitable for ever after. We have barely escaped such a cataclysm a number of times already in the past and we might not be so lucky again. Relying on Mutually Assured Destruction is not exactly a secure state to be in; and furthermore, we have paid with insecurity for the prosperity we have thus far enjoyed. We are dancing on the rim of the volcano.

The second consideration is of a longer and much slower trajectory, but with equally disastrous consequences in the longer run. If we continue to indulge in our profligate wastefulness and allow the GNP to climb higher and higher, we will inevitably bring about a natural catastrophe. At present it is global warming and pandemics that threaten us, later there will be other horrors as well. But climate warming is bad enough even on its own, as the ecological scientists predict; Stefan Rahmstorf of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Research recently declared: “If damaging tipping cascades can occur and a global tipping cannot be ruled out, then this is an existential threat to civilization.”⁶ But not only to civilization; life as we now know it will be forfeited for something else that we cannot even begin to imagine.

However, in this book we have not been concerned with such man-made natural catastrophes, as real and permanently possible as they are; rather our sole interest and focus of attention has fallen on culture, that is, on what is called *Geist* in German. For what we are threatened with is not only material destruction but spiritual devastation, the dissolution of our cultural souls. And in this respect, we are faced with a paradox analogous to that of prosperity generating insecurity, for the more cultural goods are produced and the cheaper they become, the less they are worth in real value. Quantity and quality stand in inverse relation to each other. This applies as much to knowledge as to art.

Our markets are flooded with a profusion of aesthetic products of all kinds. We are constantly immersed in art and nearly drown in it. Everywhere we look and turn, it is there. Every time we turn on our television sets or other electronic media devices a huge cavalcade of shows beams in. As we stroll the streets or shopping malls we are confronted with a cornucopia of

6 Quoted by Peter Hannam in *The Age* (Melbourne) 2 November 2019 from an article in *Nature*.

goods, all well-presented and designed, at a range of prices for every pocket. Accompanying us at every step is music; whether we like it or not – as in the nursery rhyme: “She shall have music wherever she goes”. Everywhere there are art galleries selling paintings and book shops and departments stores selling books, the best-sellers of the day.

However, we know in advance that many of the aesthetic goods that appear today will be gone by tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. Few have any lasting value. Their use-by date is of short duration, from one fashion season to the next. The books that have not been sold this month or this year will be remaindered and those still left will be pulped. The artists who exhibit this year will be replaced by a new crop of names next year. The musical hits will no longer be heard when new hits arrive as regularly as buses at a bus stop. Everything flows, you cannot step twice into the same stream or street, as ever newer sounds, sights, goods, shops and buildings are moving past at various intervals of time. Creative-destruction is as much the practice of aesthetic capitalism as of any other.

It is not all that different for knowledge either. Every year over two million scientific articles are published and this number is steadily rising. This is referred to as an “explosion of knowledge”. But actually, what is exploding is the rate of publication without all that much new knowledge being added to the established body of science. As the old joke has it, science knows more and more about less and less until it knows everything about nothing. What the joke points to is the continual narrowing of focus and interest produced by excessive specialization. But the problem goes much deeper than that, for only very few of the masses of papers published every year matter and make a real difference to knowledge. These are the ones that are essential for ongoing research. Most of the others are never read by anyone apart from their authors and perhaps referees; of those that are read, fewer still are referred to; of those that are referred to, only a fraction is actually utilized. As research has revealed, a large proportion of papers contain false information, and a very small but growing proportion are actually fraudulent.⁷ Science is no longer the noble pursuit of truth it once was; it has become an academic competitive rat-race where getting a research grant is far more important than having an idea, and recruiting collaborators and assistants counts for more than the research project itself, which is drafted so as to solicit the funds for its own undertaking.

The colleges, polytechnics and universities where most of this research is done are at the same time producing ever larger numbers of graduate

7 See Samuel Arbesman, *op. cit.* 162.

scientists, engineers, computer specialists and experts of every imaginable kind. Some of these will become academics or other professionals and in turn embark on their own research and produce a new round of articles. For this is how the system reproduces itself and keeps on expanding. Hence the explosion of knowledge.

Undeniably, this system of research is essential for our economies, and also for our medical institutions and military forces. It brings improvements in all three respects. It leads to the invention of new machines, to newer products and ways of producing them. It helps us to live longer and be more productive. But at the same time, it impacts our lives in ways that are far from salutary, especially so where it concerns our children.

The invention of the computer and the setting up of the internet was a prodigious technical feat. It led to the establishment of commercial platforms such as Facebook, Google, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Amazon and many others which were designed to create connectivity between people all over the globe and lead to knowledge being communicated throughout the world without the threat or fear of censorship or repression. But at the same time, it commercialized social media and transformed the way people traditionally related to each other. These media became potent means of spreading disinformation, false news, unsubstantiated rumours, superstitions and fanatical ideologies. People became enclosed in their own echo-chamber bubbles where all they heard were their own views amplified and reinforced by others like themselves. What was intended to bring universal enlightenment only brought confusion and darkness instead. If a cunning evil genius scientist of comic-book genre had wanted to confound mankind, he could not have invented a more potent means of doing so.⁸

The assault on the mind, and especially the mind of the young, carried out by means of the internet, is complemented by the assault on the brain carried out by means of brain implants. Much of this work is still in the experimental stage, but the direction in which it is heading is already clearly discernible. It is designed to produce a human-machine coupling, in which the human brain will be integrated into a larger cybernetic system in which it is only one component linked to artificial intelligence and cybernetic systems. There is already talk of such entities as the future evolution of humanity in the form of trans humans or cyborgs. All this is done under the guise of helping real humans repair brain damage or cure diseases such as Alzheimer's, schizophrenia,

8 See Roger McNamee, *Zucked: Waking Up to the Facebook Catastrophe* (London: Harper Collins, 2019).

autism and epilepsy. In the name of doing great good a far greater potential for harm is being unleashed.⁹

Partly as a result of all such developments, a new kind of cultural barbarism is now sweeping through mankind. It is having a pernicious effect on children and the young in general and leading to their stupefaction and ever-growing illiteracy. Of course, it is only the last in a long line of technologies that have been conducive of such effects. This is evident in the fact that as ever greater numbers attend schools, colleges and universities for ever-longer periods their capacity to read is continually decreasing. Students now graduate from high schools who cannot read at all. Many of those who graduate from colleges and universities have never read a book from cover to cover. Those who have read a book have done so with less attention or comprehension than their parents at a similar age and far less than their grandparents if they attended college or university. In some schools of music or conservatoriums students of composition can now graduate without being able to read musical notation. Even university professors now tend to read less. They mostly read articles and not books. A professor of philosophy at a leading university in America boasts that he has never read a book on philosophy; reading articles in the current journals is all he needs in order to do his kind of philosophizing.

It is now undeniable that cultural barbarism of this type is quite compatible with advanced science and technology. That was the point of Aldous Huxley's dystopian novel *Brave New World*, published nearly ninety years ago. Much of what Huxley predicted and projected into a distant future has already come to pass. This has not only happened in the material domain of genetic engineering and high-speed transportation, but also in the cultural sphere. To take but a single sentence from the novel that recounts historically how the condition of the brave new world was reached:

Accompanied by a campaign against the Past; by the closing of museums, the blowing up of historical monuments (luckily most of them had been destroyed during the Nine Years' War); by the suppression of books published before AF150.¹⁰

One can now read a sentence like this not as a futuristic prediction of what might happen, but as an actual account of what is happening or has already happened; not just during Chairman Mao's Cultural Revolution, but in our

9 See Annie Jacobsen, *The Pentagon's Brain: The Uncensored History of DARPA, America's Top Secret Military Research Agency* (New York: Little Brown, 2015).

10 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (Harmondsworth UK: Penguin 1955), 50.

own time with campaigns such as those against dead white males and the withdrawal from open shelf circulation in most libraries of books published before a certain arbitrary date.

How close we have in fact come to Huxley's world is depicted in a much more recent book by Jean Chesneaux entitled appropriately *Brave Modern World*. This is the new world of what he calls "homo mundiales modernus" which he characterizes as a "mutant species" of mankind.¹¹ The more science and technology develops, the more such mutations will occur. Through genetic engineering we are now capable of producing new species such as Huxley could not have imagined in his time. We now have crude instruments for controlling something of what goes on in a person's brain; and, as we have seen, there is on-going research to make such controls ever more comprehensive and refined in the near future. But this is by no means the limit of where such research is heading, for somewhere on the distant horizon there is the possibility of completely superseding humans with intelligent machines. There are some brave new world scientists who welcome this prospect. Thus, the issue as it is even now shaping itself is not just a matter of the end of civilization but the end of humanity itself.

Not all welcome the new knowledge with the same Panglossian optimism. Some, such as the molecular biologist Gunther Stent and the science journalist John Horgan no longer see it as making any fundamental contribution to the science we already possess. Horgan's subtitle to his book on science is "The twilight of the scientific age". The main title is *The End of Science*.¹² By that term Horgan does not mean the end of scientific research; on the contrary, he notes that scientific work goes on prolifically, but he believes we can no longer expect any of it to result in fundamental discoveries. According to Horgan, science has come to an end in the sense that no further Kuhnian style paradigm revolutions can be expected.

Horgan bases his views on the ideas put forward by Gunther Stent more than forty years ago. Stent believes that all the basic laws are already known and all the fundamental discoveries in the key sciences of physics, chemistry and biology that can be made have already been made.¹³ All that remains to be done is for these to be applied to new phenomena. He likens science to geography where previous generations of explorers discovered and explored all the key

11 Jean Chesneaux, *Brave Modern World: Prospects for Survival* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 33.

12 John Horgan, *The End of Science: The Twilight of the Scientific Age* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

13 Gunther S. Stent, *Paradoxes of Progress* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman & Co., 1978).

landmarks on all the continents. All that is left to do is to take precise measurements of these. Science is in an analogous predicament to geography, and in that sense science, too, is limited and bound to suffer from the law of diminishing returns, as large extra effort only brings increasingly small rewards. There is now considerable evidence from econometric studies of science that this is in fact happening. For example, it now takes huge investment of money and manpower resources in the pharmaceutical industry to bring a new drug onto the market, with usually only slightly better benefits than the previous drug it is displacing. Similar findings have been made across the board in the sciences.

Horgan adds to the work of Stent and others by examining what is taking place on the so-called frontiers of science, that is, in regions where one would expect startling new discoveries to be made. This is especially so at the two outer limits of the exceedingly small and the exceedingly large: namely, in sub-atomic elementary physics probing the basic constituents of matter and in astrophysics and cosmology studying the origin of the universe. These two fields of physics have unified in that they have shown that what ensued in the first fraction of a second after the Big Bang is not unlike what takes place in high-energy atom smashes. But, as Horgan notes, the physicists admit that there are limits to the energies that can be harnessed in such experimental work, and therefore limits to the extent to which theories in both these fields can be tested. The most *recherché* of these theories are no longer experimentally falsifiable, they can only be judged according to mathematical criteria of consistency and simplicity. Horgan maintains that this means that such theories, such as superstring theory, are no longer science in the old sense; it is what he calls “ironic science”, using a term of literary criticism. One need not agree with Horgan’s ideas or take them at face value to see that there is a point to his and Stent’s views of the problems of science. We have in fact considered them critically in two previous books *The Ends of Science* (1987) and *Quintessence of Dust* (2020). What we established in these works is that science as it is now practised is no longer the same kind of activity that it was during the previous era, approximately from Newton to Einstein and a little beyond. However, in this book we are not concerned with the current state of science itself – this is the subject of a separate book entitled *Art and Science: A Parallel History* – but rather with the effects it is having on culture. During the previous age of European civilization, science had an enlightening effect on culture: it brought about a fundamental change in our world view, away from traditional religion and a closed universe to an open universe governed by natural laws, which lent itself to disenchantment and secularization. The whole trend of the epochal movement called the Enlightenment was driven by the progress of science. All those who believed in it saw science as the manifest proof of Progress in

general, which they held would in time be extended to every other dimension of social life. They took science to be synonymous with Reason itself and in its name, they sought to rationalize everything.

We have learned to our cost over the past century where such beliefs can lead and what damage can be wrought by social and political movements inspired and enthused by such rationalistic ideals. We can no longer view science as inherently beneficial for culture. It can bring about social changes, especially when coupled with technology, but these need not be conducive to enlightenment. It could have the opposite effect, as we have just witnessed in relation to computers, the internet and social media. Of course, we have no idea how this will turn out in the long run, but we cannot afford to be sanguine about it. Science and technology can be opposed to civilization, and any talk of a technological civilization is little short of an oxymoron.

Nevertheless, we must now recognize that humanity in its present state cannot do without science and technology. Without it, the earth could not support eight billion inhabitants or even half that number. There are just too many people to be fed, clothed, housed and all else that human beings now require. We cannot return to a primitive life-style or become peasants once again. We must rely on science and technology; it has become our destiny. But it always carried its hidden dangers; it is always knowledge mixed with guilt. When Bacon declared in all innocence at the very start of this quest that it aimed at “effecting all things possible” he could not have foreseen what it would lead to in its end. For once we discover that something is possible, that it can be done, then the urge to do it becomes all but irresistible. This is what the physicists felt when they built the A-bomb; the problem, as Oppenheimer declared, was just “too sweet” to be resisted. Once the A-bomb was proved to work, it was impossible for them not to go on to the H-bomb; and so, they brought us closer and closer to Armageddon. After such knowledge, what forgiveness?

Such knowledge cannot be forgiven because it cannot be forgotten or unlearned, it is here to stay for all time. It has become an unalterable fate for humanity, to be endured as best we can. Science and technology give rise to many such problems that do not admit of any final solution, but require constant maintenance and management to be kept in check. The unforeseen consequences of our present science and technology will continue to plague future generations long after our time. They will need to exercise external vigilance and remedial action. To prevent such problems proliferating and spreading they will need to invoke moral laws that are stronger than the laws of technical progress.

Such problems will remain part of the human condition for the foreseeable future. This is the reason why we cannot speak of any cultural recovery

or revival of civilization at present. We live now in what we have called in an earlier work a “post-civilizational” condition.¹⁴ This will persist as long as the forces that brought it about continue to dominate human life, among which science and technology are the foremost. But as we have seen in the preceding chapters there are also economic and political forces to be considered as well, comprising what we have called the Forces of Modernity, as discussed in the first chapter.

Civilization can only emerge out of cultural renewal, but science and technology will not bring that about. Whether such a thing will ever come again in the future, we have no way of knowing. All speculation about it is mere guess work. What we do know, for we see it all about us, is that civilization is now severely damaged and might no longer recover. The worst destruction occurred during the twentieth century that “time of troubles” in Europe, China and many other parts of the world. Those parts which escaped the suicidal wars and revolutions of last century, such as America, have succumbed to rampant capitalism by opening up everything to market greed, preserving little interest in safeguarding culture or tradition or even the raising and educating of children. In these respects, the affluent life-style can be just as damaging as poverty; to have too much can corrupt just as having too little can embitter. Neither profligate wastefulness nor resentment and envy is a prescription for a good society; where both are present together, we can be sure of more “times of trouble” ahead.

Still, in our desire to counter the Panglosses we must be careful not to take the diametrically opposite point of view and exaggerate the dark side of our time. Some authors are already inclined to do so, as, for example, James Bridle who speaks of a “new dark age” and writes of it as follows: “This is a deeply dark time, in which the structures we have built to expand the sphere of our communications and discourses are being used against us – all of us – in a systematic way.”¹⁵ Bridle does not seem to have taken account of the fact that if this were true he could not be writing those words; it would be far too difficult for anyone to express such thoughts. In fact, we are not in a dark age, only in the twilight moving towards it, with no idea of whether or how it might be averted.

Twilight is our ruling metaphor; despite the fact that it has come down to us with a long and far from reputable past. It figures in Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung*, *Twilight of the Gods*, and in Nietzsche’s counter-blast against Wagner, *Götterdämmerung*, *Twilight of the Idols*. The former conveys in

14 Harry Redner, *Beyond Civilization*, op. cit.

15 James Bridle, *A New Dark Age*, op. cit, 231.

musical tones the fall of bourgeois civilization in some revolutionary upsurge; the latter went even further and outlines a coming Nihilism that will bring Christian civilization crashing down. Spengler crowns the work of both his German predecessors by describing the parabola of civilization going down in the West when its day is done. We must in all honesty admit a degree of kinship with such thinkers, even though we also applaud Karl Krause's satire of them as *Untergangsters*.¹⁶ They are certainly open to such criticism, but we must also reject the blanket dismissal of them as "cultural pessimists", which becomes a damning epithet in the mouths of inveterate optimists. Our metaphor of twilight also owes much to Hegel's dictum that "the owl of Minerva takes wing at dusk", for it is only when the long day of civilization is nearly over that we can look back and see what it accomplished from dawn to dusk.

Twilight can be a wonderful and enchanted time for children, when shadows lengthen as the light dims and everything familiar takes on the aura of mystery and magic in a still and hushed atmosphere. There are many such grown up children at present who love to play with their scientific or academic toys, discovering a neat trick they can play on nature or inventing a new game they can play with each other, and they think themselves ever so clever and good. Nietzsche called such people "the last men". "We have discovered happiness," say the last men and they blink."¹⁷ While they carry on with their games and diversions twilight darkens and night is about to fall, and in the night, as Hegel said, all cats are black, there is nothing to be discerned any more.

But as yet, it is only twilight not yet night. The "polar night of icy hardness and darkness" that Weber predicted a century ago did come about, but only at certain times and in certain places; it did not become general and it has now passed.¹⁸ Had it persisted for much longer these words could never have been written. The fact that they are being written and read means that we are neither in the best of times nor in the worst of times, for who would write such things in good times; or alternatively, as Edgar puts it in *King Lear*: "The worst is not, as long as we can say 'this is the worst.'" We cannot say "this is the worst" for worse is still to come, unless we can muster our strength and moral will to resist it.

But before we can even resolve to do anything we must first understand the nature of the difficulties. We are beset by problems, few of which have easy

16 See Harry Redner, *The Tragedy of European Civilization*, op. cit, Part 2, "Untergangsters of History and Philosophy".

17 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. Anon. (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1950), 9.

18 Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation", op, cit, 128.

answers or solutions. Even to call them problems is a confusing and potentially misleading way of putting it. For as we have previously spelled out, these predicaments have become part of the human condition. But that does not mean that there is nothing to be done about it, or that people should accept the inevitable in an abject state of fatalism. Thus, for example, the environmental issue is not a problem that will ever be solved or overcome; it will remain for the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, we need to act continually in order to keep it from getting worse and worse over time. It is as if we were in a leaking ship far from port and only continuous bailing can keep it afloat. So, it is with all the inherent problems of global living: they are here to stay.

It was in this spirit of an on-going collective endeavour for the whole of mankind that in an earlier work we proposed the idea of a movement for cultural conservation to parallel that for natural conservation.¹⁹ By this we meant something more than the already existing organization for preserving historic heritage, such as the sites, homes and heirlooms of past generations. This is obviously essential, but it is not enough. It does not serve all that much to conserve old buildings when what went on within them has vanished; the structures might remain but their spirit has gone.

This is particularly true of our old universities where the buildings remain intact but the sense of being in a university in the old way has disappeared and given way to a frenetic rush for research funds so that ever more papers can be published. What used to be beacons of enlightenment have become more like degree factories. Those who graduate from them can no longer refer to their *alma mater*, for there is little soul left in what is taught there. This, too, is a problem that has no solution for it leads to an unending battle to preserve as much as can still be saved of the old university culture and fend off the forces tending to destroy it. It is a struggle that must be waged with different means and following various strategies in the various academic systems of the world. It is not something for which one can offer prescriptions that will hold for all cases and conditions. Analogously, all efforts to conserve culture will have to be adjusted to local conditions. There are no general principles valid for all situations.

This still leaves the question unanswered of what is the point of conserving old cultures and maintaining what is still left of civilization, when all the main currents of contemporary society run against this? There were many in the past, such as the Futurist artists, who held that we should make a clean sweep

19 Harry Redner, *Conserving Cultures: Technology, Globalization and the Future of Local Cultures* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

of the rotten civilization of the past and clear the ground so that a new civilization can be built in its place. We are now all too well aware of where that line of thinking led. At present there are those who hold that the West, given its racist and colonialist past, does not deserve to be preserved. It must be allowed to expire from its own sickness so that a healthier and more innocent East can flourish in its place. And if it is not the East, then it is the South that is held up as our future hope, as when McCloskey looks forward to the African geniuses to come.

At present we have no grounds to entertain such hopes. Nor can we allow ourselves the prophetic daring of the Nietzsche who dreamt of the Superman and confidently expected something much better to sprout on the ruins of the West. Many of his followers, such as Heidegger and others, looked to Hitler as the leader of genius who would initiate the dawn of a new kind of Being. They went from twilight to dawn and forgot about the intervening night. And it is night at its deepest and blackest that in fact ensued, and what followed instead of dawn was just the same twilight grown even darker. Europe rebuilt its ruined cities and recovered economically to new unparalleled heights of prosperity, but its culture was fatally wounded, if not killed outright.

After the initial calamity of the First World War, Weber refused to engage in any prophetic prognostications about the future. Politics he declared was the slow boring through of hard boards; it must be undertaken with resilience and resolve, and not by looking for charismatic leaders to provide salvation. We would do well to follow his advice now. We must persevere as best we can and maintain what of undeniable value we still possess, rather than indulge in destruction in the hope of a better future. Radicals, who still have a hankering for revolution despite the tragic disasters of the past, will no doubt castigate this stance as another form of conservatism. And there is some truth in that as far as culture is concerned, for conservation and conservatism come together in this respect. But this does not mean that one needs to follow conservative policies in politics or economics.

Eliot was a conservative in a much stronger sense for he declared himself an Anglican in religion, a royalist in politics and a classicist in art. One need not follow him in these respects. Nevertheless, what he has to say about culture and its conservation in prose works such as his *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* should still be read for it has a great deal to teach us.²⁰ And of course, there is his great poetry from which we can draw inspiration. It is in the spirit

20 T.S. Eliot, "Notes Towards a Definition of Culture" in John Hayward (ed.), T.S. Eliot: *Selected Prose*. (Harmondsworth UK: Penguin/Peregrine, 1963), 231–235.

of this poetry that we have engaged in our search for understanding about where we stand at present, knowing full well that at the end of our endeavour we will once again be faced with the anguished question: after such knowledge, what forgiveness?

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